

Year B Epistle: Ephesians 1:3-14

But with Mark 10:13-16 (As the set Gospel wasn't appropriate)

Service of Baptism with Holy Communion

I wonder if any of us have ever inherited anything from someone else? When we inherit things, as opposed to money, it's often some sort of treasured item, that had deep significance for them, and which very often becomes very significant for us.

I've brought with me this morning a few things that I have inherited, to help us think about our Bible readings, and what it means to be baptised.

When I was little I was baptised, just like Sophie and Emilia are going to be later. One of my Godparents was an aunt called Audrey, but she wasn't very well, and when I was about 3 years old, she sadly died. One of the few things that I have inherited from her - that I've treasured for the 40+ years since - is this **little donkey**.

Can anyone think of a Bible story that involves a donkey?

- In the Christmas story, with often think that Joseph puts the pregnant Mary on a donkey for the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. But there's nothing the Bible actually says about there being a donkey in that part of the Jesus' story. But there is in another.
- In Matthew 21, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on what we know as Palm Sunday on a donkey. That may seem a little odd, but at the time a donkey was an animal that was accepted as being suitable for royalty to ride on, particularly if they were trying to show their humility. Jesus was subtly showing people that as God's Son, he was their King. God wanted Jesus to be King of everyone's lives, and the enthusiastic welcome that he received from the people that day shouting Hosanna, and throwing down cloaks and palm leaves, suggested that they really understood that.

This morning, Emilia and Sophie have travelled with their families to be here, not (as far as I'm aware) by donkey, but to say among other things, that they want Sophie and Emilia to know Jesus as their king. The first reading this morning talked about our relationship with God being possible because of Jesus, and Jesus being with and part of God from the very beginning of all things, not just at the point that he became human. But God made himself human in Jesus, so that like it says in our second reading, he could welcome us and draw us to him for a big hug and a blessing. Jesus isn't a distant king who lives in a castle, but someone who wants to meet us, and be our friend.

Here's something else that I have inherited. It's a necklace, or to be more precise a **small oval locket** - I don't think it came on this particular chain. Can anyone see what is on the outside of the locket?

It's a **cross** (blue enamel, but that doesn't matter). This locket came from an old lady who lived at the top of my road, and who was a bit like a granny to me, even though she wasn't actually my granny. Her name was Tommy... or Miss. Tomlinson if you didn't know her. I remember her for various reasons; she made very strong tea, taught me to milk goats, and had a bit of a thing about frogs. But more importantly, she was a Christian, who I saw living out her life making sacrifices in her own life for other people. One of my school friends lived with her, because as a young girl her parents hadn't been able to look after her, and so Tommy had taken her into her home, and adopted her. Tommy had another adult friend who fell on hard times and didn't have anywhere to live, so Tommy took her in as well. At some points in my teenage years, Tommy's house seemed quite crowded!

What do we associate the cross with?

When Christians see a cross we think of Jesus dying on a cross, on what we call Good Friday. Can we remember why we call that Friday when Jesus died "good"?

It was good because as God's Son, Jesus was perfect and never did anything wrong in the eyes of God. But the people who thought God was distant, and who had created lots of difficult rules to help people feel close to him, didn't agree, and had him killed. The really tough bit for us to understand, and which didn't really seem possible until Easter morning, was that by dying without actually having deserved it in any way at all, and defeating death to rise again he was making it possible for us to be forgiven for the things that we do wrong. This is something else that our first reading this morning also talks about; it is the free gift of God (an idea we call "grace"), that because Jesus died on the cross and rose again, we can if we recognise the wrong things we do, receive God's forgiveness.

That is why Emilia and Sophie's parents and godparents will be asked to make, or remake, a decision themselves and for the children, that they are turning away from the wrong things we call sin, and turning towards Jesus. It is also why we use the sign of the cross on Sophie and Emilia's heads during the baptism. It's a sign that together we are committing these two little girls into the protection of someone who was willing to die for them, Jesus our king, who died and rose again to new life.

The last thing which I've inherited that I want to show you this morning, is... **my shirt**. I inherited the material for this shirt when my mother died 22 years ago. I think you will agree it's rather bright and colourful, and it's also silk. I think it was one of those remaindered bargains you get - my Mum never could resist a bargain. For about 17 years I had no idea what to do with it, and it lived tucked away with some other bits and pieces in a big box.

For the last 10 years of her life, my Mum had worked really hard campaigning for it to be possible to be ordained priest if you were a woman. She didn't feel called to be ordained herself, and we never had a discussion about any possibility my being ordained. She was doing that work for others, as part of what she believed to be right as a Christian. It was in effect her way of living, what our first reading this morning describes as "to the praise of God's glory".

So, when I was ordained priest, it seemed utterly appropriate to turn that lovely material of my mother's into a clerical shirt, something that honoured her work for God's glory, that I could wear as part of my work for God's glory.

Being baptised is all about starting to live to God's glory. As parents and Godparents, and as the family of God's church who are welcoming Sophie and Emilia this morning, we are all trying to live lives that give God praise and glory, doing what we believe God wants us to do. It is something that we are all committing to do this morning.

In the case of Emilia and Sophie's families and Godparents, it means making choices to do things like pray with the children, and tell them Bible stories, either through toys and games, or answering their questions, or at bedtime. For the rest of us it means that as Sophie and Emilia grow, and as we see them in church, or at school or because we're friends, we also need to be setting an example of doing what Jesus wants us to do, in the way we behave, and the different things we do in church and for the community.

The very best inheritance that we have from God is Jesus, the king who welcomed little children and blessed them and who wants us to all be like little children so that he can bless us. The very best inheritance that we have from God is Jesus, the king who died for us on the cross and rose again to new life. The very best inheritance that we can offer to Emilia and Sophie, as to any other child, is the example of lives lived to God's praise and glory, because we love Jesus, our king.