

11 16 3rd Sunday before Advent 6th November 2016

Job 19.23-27a, 2 Thessalonians 2.1-5, 13-17, Luke 20 27-38.

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Well folks – you can now start to get ready for Christmas and enjoy the mince pies. I know the pubs have been saying book early for Christmas since August Bank Holiday and the shops are full of the many things they say we need to celebrate a good Christmas – but it's official – it's the 3rd Sunday before Advent.

The Church agrees that Christmas is definitely coming.

But when Bill and I went into our favourite coffee shop yesterday morning we weren't expecting to hear Bing Crosby singing 'White Christmas'. Definitely too early for that.

When I read the gospel for today I had to look up and check on Sadducees and I imagined that others may have difficulties with Pharisees and Sadducees and the other people with authority in the Jewish culture of Palestine at the time of Jesus Christ.

One young boy – at that time -was having such problems – and asked his mother to explain it – saying I don't understand about Sadducees and Pharisees. In a loving -motherly way she managed to get out of that by saying: 'ask you dad when he gets home'.

After a long day in the fields Samuel was not ready for deep theological questions. 'Why are you asking that now? Have you been listening to your mother and her friends again?' Samuel knew that his wife Mary and her friends talked about Jesus and how popular he was becoming and was he a threat to their beloved Jewish religion?

The boy – named Joseph – immediately jumped to his mother's defence.

No no it's not mum – it's my friend Simon. His brother is Matthew and he's been with Jesus almost from the beginning – and when he comes home he tells the whole family what's been said and done. But he doesn't have time to explain it all to the young members of the family – so they ask their friends if they understand it.

I want to be a follower of Christ – when I grow up - I want to be a disciple.

Samuel and Mary were astonished to hear such things from their 9 year old son – and set about explaining what he wanted to know. Samuel thought he knew what had brought about this question from his son because he worked with Matthew's father and he knew what had happened.

The Pharisees were an entirely religious body without political ambitions and were content with any government that let them carry out the ceremonial law.

The Sadducees were few but very wealthy aristocrats and were largely co-ordinating with Rome in order to keep their wealth – comfort and position.

The Pharisees believed in and hoped for the coming of the Messiah.

The Sadducees did not – the coming of the long awaited Messiah would bring an end to their well-ordered lives. This was why they came to Jesus with the question that they thought would surely be difficult for him to answer – but they were wrong.

They tried to trip Jesus up on the subject of the Resurrection.

According to the original Levite laws it was as described in the start of their challenge to Jesus.

When a man died childless his widow must marry his brother – and theoretically – it could happen again and again. It is unlikely that this was used at the time of Jesus – but to the Sadducees it was part of the Mosaic regulations and as such was regarded as binding. Sadducees did not believe in the Resurrection. The beliefs of the Pharisees were very different – they did believe in the resurrection.

So Jesus debated with the Sadducees – who were rich – and well educated – and not accustomed to having ordinary people arguing with them. Prior to this exchange no-one had been able to meet them on that subject – but Jesus did. He pointed out that Moses had heard God say – I am the god of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. All three of these were long dead but must be alive to God for him to acknowledge them in his statement.

Samuel continued explaining to his son and his wife who also realised she had a lot to learn.....

Matthew - the disciple said that Jesus was popular with the ordinary people because he spoke in the language that they would understand. He used arguments that people he was arguing with would understand. And they all agreed that it was to his credit that he could debate with any class of men – but no-one before had spoken to the ordinary people in the way that he did.

People were realising that he didn't speak of rules and regulations that everyone else found important. Jesus talked to them in their own language – in words they would understand.

He met them wherever they were – in towns – villages and on a grassy hillside.

Jesus spoke - most importantly - of LOVE. The love that he and his Father had for them and the love he hoped they would have for each other.

But Matthew had also said that Jesus was traveling a very dangerous road – and it had not been a good idea to argue with the Sadducees – but that was typical.

He always faced up to what he had to say and do – without fear.

Samuel – Mary and Joseph agreed that it would be for the best not to talk about this outside the house. There would come a time when Jesus and the story of his ministry would be common knowledge – but for now – it was likely that Samuel's employer was a Sadducee and they must not risk losing home and job.

They hugged each other and said good night – sharing the love that they had for each other.

May we – also - share God's love - between ourselves and with those whom we meet – and may we also have the confidence of Christ to speak of God's Love for everyone

Amen.