

HOMILY PREACHED AT SJH TRINITY 2 WEEK10 YEAR C 9 JUNE 2013

As I've often said, we can understand the gospel passages we hear in church much better if we read them in context, rather than take each chunk Sunday by Sunday on its own. The references for next week's readings are printed on the bulletin specifically so that people can get out their bibles at home to do this – and a decent modern translation, set out in paragraphs, will be much easier to read than the Authorised or King James Version.

Last week's gospel was about Jesus healing a centurion's servant whilst still some distance from the house where he was ill. The centurion declared a remarkable faith in Jesus' power. Today's gospel, which follows straight on from last week's passage, has Jesus bringing a young man back to life. There are obvious contrasts between the two miracles. The first was at a distance; in the second Jesus actually touches the bier on which the young man is lying. That would have made Jesus ritually unclean, though S. Luke doesn't develop this point. Faith is a major part of the first miracle; it isn't mentioned in the second. The emphasis is on Jesus' compassion.

In the passage which follows today's reading we hear of John the Baptist sending two of his followers to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah. Jesus' reply is

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

In other words, Jesus' miracles are evidence of who he is.

But the miracles only take us so far. Raising someone from the dead is almost incredible – it is God's work – and the large crowd glorify God, saying, "God has looked favourably on his people!" Of Jesus they say, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" They would have remembered the prophets Elijah and Elisha who also brought widows' sons back from the dead. It was only after Jesus' own resurrection that a few people – his followers – realised that he was more than a prophet, more than the expected Messiah: that he could rightly be called the Son of God.

This should get us thinking about how we regard Jesus and how we proclaim him to others. It's straightforward to present him as a prophet or teacher, but that would put him alongside the Buddha or Mohammed or Confucius. And if we present him as a Messiah, in the sense of a deliverer from unjust rule, that puts the emphasis on social freedom. He is a teacher; he is a deliverer; but more than these he is the giver of life, the conqueror of death. He raises us from the

death of sin to a life lived in fellowship with him. When we experience this, following his teaching and living rightly in the world will come naturally. And people will see the difference!