

Father Philip's Address to St Paul's Assembly

Thursday 26th September, 2013

STANDING UP FOR JESUS

This morning we have sung a hymn which should be enough to wake even the most tired among you this morning!

Stand up, stand up for Jesus has been the favourite hymn of many people since it was written in 1858, 155 years ago.

At that time there was a well known priest in America who was famous for his preaching and speaking against slavery. His name was Dudley Tyng. Dudley had his own farm and one evening got the sleeve of his shirt caught in a new machine he had bought for the farm. His arm was taken into the machine which cut his arm right off.

Of course there were no antibiotics at the time and there was little that could be done for him, so he lay dying. One of his assistants asked if there was anything he could do to help, and Dudley said "just tell them to stand up for Jesus".

You may never have heard of that assistant before, but his name is written next to the hymn we just sang in your hymnbooks, 'George Duffield'. George went home after Dudley died and wrote the words as a tribute to his friend. That line in it which we sang 'the arm of flesh will fail you' is one which looks back at how Dudley died by losing his arm, but also looks forward to remind us today that we cannot rely on ourselves, we must rely on God in everything that we do.

The same is true in our Bible reading this morning.

Simon Peter was exhausted. He had worked all night with his companions and caught no fish at all. Then Jesus (who is a carpenter remember, and not a fisherman) came along and told Simon Peter to try again.

Simon did as he was asked, but he was probably muttering under his breath that it would be a waste of time, that there would be no possibility that they would catch any fish at all.

Until, of course, that they caught so many fish that the boat almost sank. And Simon Peter fell on his knees and said to Jesus 'Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man'.

Simon Peter – or Peter as we know him more in the Gospels, was almost the 'Right hand man' of Jesus. The most important disciple and apostle of Jesus, but he let Jesus down:

- He told Jesus three times that he would never deny him,
- And three times when he was asked he denied Jesus, he pretended that he didn't know who Jesus was.
- In today's Gospel reading Peter thinks that it is a waste of time to try fishing again, and then he sees the miraculous number of fish which they catch and he knows he let Jesus down by doubting him.

Peter may have been the 'right hand man' of Jesus, but when he was given the opportunity to 'stand up' for Jesus and tell people that he knew him, he didn't and it was almost like Dudley losing his arm.

But what Dudley knew as he was dying and told the people to 'stand up for Jesus' and what George Duffield knew who wrote that hymn, and what Saint Peter came to know after the death and resurrection of Jesus, is that when we stand up for Jesus, when we tell people that we are Christians and do not hide it, we don't do it alone – we do it with God.

We clothe ourselves not with the armour of a military soldier, but with the Gospel armour: truth; righteousness; peace; faith; salvation and the spirit. ¹

We all have times in our life when we feel that we cannot achieve what we want to achieve, when we feel that we may let other people down. There are times when we may feel alone or isolated in what we doing.

At those times, remember that you are not alone, but supported by God himself:

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the Gospel armour, each piece put on with prayer;
When duty calls or danger be never wanting there.

¹ Ephesians 6:10-18