

**Sermon from the Institution and Induction of Simon Winn
as Vicar of St Alfege Greenwich
23 March 2021**



Numbers 21. 4-9 - John 8. 21-30 (the readings available at the bottom of this paper).

The Parish webpage with the service [is here](#), the order of service [is here](#), and the video recording of the service [is here](#). An audio file of sermon (with some loud organ music at the beginning...) [is here](#).

Firstly, Kia ora, Simon,
Haere mai, Haere mai, Haere mai!
Welcome, thrice welcome.

As one Pakeha to another,
as one non-Maori, to another,
each with a heart captured by the land of the long white cloud
and the wonderful people of Aotearoa/New Zealand,
welcome.

Welcome now, to Greenwich.
Welcome to this ancient church,
founded on St Alfege and his ministry,
this church where Thomas Tallis composed and played,
where unnumbered souls found faith
and find it still.

We hope that you and **Lizzi and Harriet & Charlie**
will swiftly feel at home here,
will flourish here,
and be a Gospel beacon here,
at St Alfege.

Well.

“This is a dreadful sermon”

Sorry - I don't mean me preaching,

Not so much - Me and this sermon

- though I grant you

it is still a little too early in this one to come to a considered judgment on that, yet...

Nor do I mean to disparage the context and setting

by a dreadful sermon this evening, either.

It is a joy for me to be preaching, and I'm grateful for the opportunity, Bishop

Christopher,

at the start of this new phase of ministry

- however difficult might be the scripture passages you have gifted me !

No. “This is a dreadful sermon”

is what Martin Luther is reputed to have said of this gospel passage.

“This is a dreadful sermon, an appalling and dreadful word of farewell.”

Given that Jesus starts by saying:

‘I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.’

These are: appalling and dreadful word of farewell.”

This sermon of Jesus must have filled his hearers with dread.

No wonder the Jews said, is he going to die? ‘Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying,

“Where I am going, you cannot come”?’

This, on top of our first reading, with the fear of death:

Where: The people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?’

The morbidity in both readings,

and surrounding Jesus

was palpable.

There is an almost an Alfeagian ring to the words

- if you can use the name of St Alfege - in that way.

Alfege, then Archbishop of Canterbury,

had been captured and held to ransom

by Viking raiders.

Alfege refused to allow payment to be made for his release

- and there must have been some around him

who felt a sense of doom

on hearing those appalling and dreadful words.
An Alfegian ring.

Especially, as we know from both accounts - Jesus and Alfege - it ended in their brutal murders.

In the case of Alfege, Right on this spot,
on 19 April 1012, over a thousand summer seasons past.

But Jesus didn't leave it there.
He went on to say:
I told you that you would die in your sins,
for you will die in your sins UNLESS!
unless you believe that I am he.'

Here is the way forward, the way to life.

'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he,

'Who ARE you?' interject the hearers
And after a moment of 'why do I bother' from Jesus,
He re-focusses.

Lifted up
Lifted as was the serpent in the book of Numbers
Lifted as was the crucified Christ

The Christ who once lifted up is the source of salvation and life
not, as at first glance it appeared, as all destruction and death.

Even has he faced his own death, Jesus said
And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone.

Simon, as we approach Holy Week,
Lift high the cross.
Lift Jesus high, in this place.
Lift Jesus high in your heart.
Lift Jesus high in your ministry - that is actually his ministry.

John's Gospel is famous for the I am sayings -
you are all familiar with them
I am the Good Shepherd,
I am the way the truth and the life

and we have a few others bundled together, today:

I am not of this world
I am from above
I am going away,

and also:

you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.
When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he

John in the gospel observes what happens: and what does?
As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Simon,
May many believe in him here, too.

Look to Jesus, point to Jesus.
As he transformed the lives of those who heard him then,
He will transform the lives of the people of this community now too.

Transformed for good.
Transformed for good.

So Simon, here you are, in Greenwich - where time begins!
May you find aroha (love), here,
May you share aroha (love) here.

This is now the gathering, the hui
These are now your people, your whānau, your family,
This is now your whenua, your homeland
These are your taonga, your treasured possessions.

You are much travelled, and much broadened
and gifted by God in that.

Here now is the time, and the place.

Jesus said:
And the one who sent me is with me;
he has not left me alone

And the Jesus who sent you,
is with you;
he has not left you alone
he will not leave you alone.

Lets us pray:

God of your people through the millennia,
and across the miles
Grant us the full knowledge of your presence,
and your transforming hope as we fix our eyes
on the one one lifted high
for the salvation of the whole world,
even Jesus Christ,

your Son, our Lord. Amen

OLD TESTAMENT READING

read by Harriet Winn

Numbers 21. 4-9

From Mount Hor the people of Israel set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

This is the Word of the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING

Read by the Revd Caroline Risdon, Assistant Priest

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

All Glory to you O Lord.

John 8. 21-30

Again Jesus said to them, 'I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' Then the Jews said, 'Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.' They said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.' They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.' As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All Praise to you O Christ.

THE SERMON

*The Ven. Alastair Cutting,
Archdeacon of Lewisham & Greenwich*