

Homily

Sunday 3 (A)

26 January 2020

According to figures published on Boxing Day, the most watched TV programme on Christmas Day 2019, with an incredible 11.6 million viewers, was Gavin & Stacey, making it the biggest of the decade across all channels. Perhaps you were one of the 11.6 million.

Mrs Brown's Boys and Strictly Come Dancing remained in the top ten, as did the Queen's Christmas Message, a perennial favourite. In fact this year, the queen managed to nudge Strictly into 3rd place and see off competition from all three of Eastenders, Coronation Street and Emmerdale.

Some of these programmes, especially the soaps, have a huge all-year-round following – people who will settle down week by week to observe the escapades of the residents of a small part of the East End of London or of Weatherfield or of Adelaide or wherever. These faithful followers are, we might say, religious in their devotion to their chosen soap opera.

The same is true of followers of a particular sports team or person, who not only follow every game or match, every move and transfer, but often literally follow them around the country or Europe or even the world.

By definition, we Christians are **followers** of Christ, and hopefully religious in our devotion to him.

Some of us, probably most of us, were baptised as babies. We are fortunate enough to be Christians because somebody else made a decision for us, which we later made our own. For others of us, becoming a Christian is perhaps something we came to later in life after making a conscious decision to be baptised and take seriously the claims of Jesus.

Whichever of those it is, I would like to suggest that we are all actually Christians for another reason – **that Jesus called us!**

None of the people who followed Jesus in the Gospels were volunteers. Andrew, Simon, James, John...each and every follower of Jesus started following him because he called them, or healed them.

And it's the same with us. Whether you were brought up a Christian or came to it later in life, you are here because Christ took the initiative and chose and called you. He calls us to listen to him, to watch him, to become **like** him and to do the things he does.

He calls us not because we are worthy and perfect; not because we are big and clever; but because he is gracious, because he wants to bless us, and because he wants to use us – to call *others* to him.

One of the most important and distinctive celebrations for our Methodist friends is the yearly Covenant Renewal Service, going back to John Wesley himself. In that service each person embraces afresh the call to follow Christ, in a similar way that we do every time we renew our Baptismal promises. The Covenant Prayer prayed during that service reminds our friends that following Jesus is not easy; and may not be comfortable. We can use it to pledge ourselves wholeheartedly to following Jesus, confessing the times we have failed in the past, and asking for strength to follow in the future.

'I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.' Amen

The Methodist Covenant Prayer

Fr Paul