

- It's very easy to make Christin faith seem like a guilt trip.
 - Things we ought to be doing. Challenges we are called to face.
- When I came off my bike and broke my shoulder, cycling down country lanes in the dark about 6 years ago, the deal I made with Helen was that I would buy some very good bike lights. Consequently we took out a small mortgage and I am the proud owner of a light that makes car drivers curse.
 - They cannot possibly miss me coming, and I cannot use the excuse that I did not see the pothole!
- Jesus said, *'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.'*
 - What Jesus should have said is *'You are the light of the world.'* A bicycle coming down a country lane at night cannot be hidden as long as its light is shining brightly.
- *'let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'*
- Do you want to be seen as someone whose light is shining brightly?
 - Yes, we all solemnly say, nodding our heads so we can feel holy. But by the time we leave church we'll have forgotten all about it.
 - Jesus is calling us to feed the hungry, visit prisoners, care for refugees, save the planet and sacrificially support the Church in time and talents and money. Then our light will shine very bright indeed! It's surely no accident that Matthew places this in his Gospel directly after the Beatitudes, those curious statements about how to be blessed, and what it means
- And it all sounds perfectly exhausting!
- But it is also certainly true that the sacrificial giving of St Mary's church members we are able to shine a bright light on the parish, the wider community in Britain and indeed the world. We have just enabled over £2 100 to be given to charities to support the homeless. We are making a small but profound difference in taking responsibility for resettling one refugee family. We are raising awareness of the human responsibility to combat climate change. We are feeding the hungry through the Foodbank. We are comforting those who mourn through our work with the bereaved. Just a few examples. And there are many more.
 - Surely our light does shine quite brightly?
- Could it be said that we at St Mary's are like salt? Are we distinctively different. Do we add distinct value to the world of which we are part?
 - Well, yes, and no. Because at the same time we are all too human in our responses to threatening situations. We do squabble a bit. Sometimes, quite a lot. We know our responsibility about climate change, but we still drive cars, be they electric or otherwise. Our willingness to change only goes so far down the line of personal inconvenience. And we are very quick to blame other people for mistakes rather than admit very much blame ourselves. But to be honest I'm not sure I know a human being for whom these three failings are not true.
- But Jesus also said, *'I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'*
 - I don't know about you, but if we are supposed to take that statement seriously, I have grave doubts about whether I'm going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - However before we all start getting our knickers in a twist, remember that this is surely true for the whole of humanity and it is the whole of humanity that Jesus came to save.
- Face it. God is perfect. We are not. But by relying on the cross of Jesus, who acknowledges all our failings and carries their weight on his back, we get to the Kingdom of Heaven through the grace of God.
- It was no different for the Church in Corinth in our second reading. This was a very transparently human Church. If you remember the reading in church from a couple of weeks ago you'll know that they squabbled a lot. You only have to read a little later into the letter to discover that they are not great at caring for each

other. Generosity was not one of their qualities! Their stewardship was up the creek. They looked after themselves as individuals rather than taking responsibility for their part in looking after the Church of God.

- They thought of themselves as rather spiritually mature but St Paul writes to them to claim otherwise. He does not try to persuade them through his eloquence but rather by focussing them back on Jesus.
- *'When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.'*
- And knowing nothing except Jesus Christ is surely the key, and the same as what is happening in our Gospel reading. When we think we have to do everything through our own strength, polish up our lamps so that they shine brightly, add salt to more and more things that we do, we are heading for exhaustion, disillusion and the feeling of failure. We cannot manage it and the salt loses its taste and the cycle lap batteries run out. And if that has ever happened to you on a dark country lane, you'll know just how disorientating and subsequently terrifying it is!
 - So if you are feeling exhausted at the prospect of yet another invitation to do something positive and you're not quite sure you've got it in you.
 - Or if you have ever felt guilty about not wanting to give more.
 - Or if you start to feel useless because everything you try just seems to go wrong.
 - Or if anger and frustration at the incompetence of others is making your brow furrowed and your answers snappy.
 - Then you are a typical member of this Church and the Corinthian Church and probably every other Church congregation in the world. You are stuck between the wisdom and power of God and the wisdom and seductive allure of the world.
- St Paul writes, *'it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.'*
 - Both these readings say that the way out of this unpleasant conundrum in which, all too often, we find ourselves, is to come back to Jesus. To *'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.'*
- Jesus Christ is of course the light that shines brighter than any other, the light of the world.
 - The fact that you are here today or you are reading this online means that you probably know this and you at least try in a very human way to *'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ'*. So what does this mean for you and me? How can one tell that we *'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ'*?
- For me, the only way I know, is to consciously think about giving God glory, through worship, best of all with other people. Do you know a different way? If so, I would be delighted to know what it is!
 - Worship takes the focus off me and my tawdry little hopes and desires and puts it firmly on Jesus.
 - And if I remember that Jesus is on the cross, I can even hand him those same tawdry little hopes and desires which somehow seems to destroy them of their life-denying power. It's not that they necessarily go away. It's rather that they lose some of their importance and sometimes in my enjoyment of being in the presence of Jesus, I even forget about them.
- And the wonderful thing about Jesus is that he doesn't seem to disapprove when I make a mistake. Rather he seems to hold out his arms and want to hug me.
- And the wonderful thing about Jesus is that he doesn't seem to load me up with a dozen extra pressures, thing I feel I ought to do. Rather he entuses me to look at the world with compassion and makes me actively want to do something positive. And my light starts to shine again.
 - And according to Corinthians it is the Spirit of God that makes this happen. For *'we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things'*.
- So maybe the message today is not to go out and consciously seek to let your light shine. For just 'doing things', because we think we ought to, seems to lead to trouble and depression and failure, whatever Church congregation we are in. Rather the message is to strive to *'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.'*, and to see where that leads you.
- So think about what that means for you. And talk about it with your Christian friends. Amen.