

# **Sermon on Wednesday 10 February 2021**

## **by Forbes Mutch**

*Gospel: Matthew 13: 31-32*



The last time I gave a sermon - sorry, reflection - I spoke about Christ's first miracle, his unobtrusive and low-profile turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Some of you may have heard that and I make no apology for picking up the same theme this morning, that God is in the small things of our lives.

So, it's the 10th of February. On this day in history, in 1502, Vasco da Gama set sail from Lisbon, Portugal, on another voyage to India. He'd been there before. No big deal. In 1840, Queen Victoria married Prince Albert. Another royal wedding. They happen all the time. A hundred years later, in 1940, the first Tom and Jerry cartoon was released. Now that is a big deal. As some of you know, a few other things were happening around 1940 but not as important as Tom and Jerry (I'm joking, by the way). And in 1996 on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, an IBM supercomputer called Deep Blue defeated Garry Kasparov at chess, the first time artificial intelligence beat a Grand Master.

So the 10th of February is not overly remarkable in history, but stuff did happen. And, of course, in those same years, huge events were

changing the way people lived their lives - like the Renaissance, where Europeans were visiting far-off lands, the industrial revolution was changing the social infrastructure of Europe, the Second World War, microchip technology. That was what was really happening.

I'll let you into a secret. I am a closet historian. I like reading about the past, seeing how different people and events and cultures fit together in the complicated tapestry of time, seeing who the prominent thinkers are, who the influencers are and why.

And I sometimes enjoy trying to apply that thinking to my own life. I've always kept a personal diary, which has become a historical record, if you like, of days and years gone by; where I am, what I'm doing, who I've met. I rarely revisit this diary but, occasionally, sometimes to settle an argument, I will look something up. When I do, it always amuses me that the pages record the little things in life, rather than the momentous events of the world stage.

I used to joke with a friend in the 1970s, when the threat of nuclear Armageddon was real that, we would all go into our bunkers under the stairs to escape the radiation and worry, not about the future of civilisation and mankind, but whether we'd let the cat into the house or whether we'd left the bath tap running.

In my diary, on the night that Margaret Thatcher won a landslide general election victory in 1979, arguably heralding a new era in British politics, I've noted that Nottingham Forest had just beaten Southampton 1-0 in the English First Division. Surely that was much more important?

Usually, looking back, it is the little things that we remember in our own personal histories rather than what's happening on the big canvas of the world that make the most impact. It's the throwaway comments in a largely forgotten conversation that stick in your mind

and influence your life, sometimes negatively, but more often positively. Equally, it's the small things that we do and say that often influence the lives of other people.

To my mind, that is when God uses us as instruments of change. We may not realise it at the time; we may not realise it at all, that's up to God.

Switching track slightly (but I will come back), the 10th of February is also the feast day of St Scholastica, who died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February AD 543. She is a saint of the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion. She was the twin sister of St Benedict, who founded the order of Benedictine monks, and she is traditionally regarded as the founder of the Benedictine nuns. All of that is Big Stuff in the history of the Christian Church. But it is one small story that she is most remembered for.

She was very close to her brother, but he was a monk and she was a nun and the rules meant that they could meet only once a year. She loved him. She valued their time together. When they met, they talked all day of heavenly things but, rules being rules, come the evening Benedict had to go.

On one occasion, as the evening closed in and their day together approached an end, she asked her brother to bend the rules. Stay a bit longer. Continue the conversation. He said no.

So she quietly prayed to God to keep him there a little longer, and God changed the weather, set up a storm and brought a torrential downpour.

According to St Benedict's biographer, no less than Pope Gregory the Great, Benedict was angry about what she had done. And she replied with a bit of scholastic sarcasm, something like: *I asked you and you would not listen; so I asked my God and he did listen. So*

*off you go if you want to but just remember, it seems that God wants you to stay.*

Benedict was unable to return to his monastery and he and his sister spent the night in discussion. He left the next morning. And Scholastica died three days later. I would say that God knew that this was going to happen and he used her off-hand comment to ensure that the pious Benedictine monk broke the rules to spend the longest time with his beloved sister before she died.

Sometimes, that's the way God works, urging us to change our plans.

Referring to my diary, I can tell you that on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2013, I met a friend in the pub and I told him about my growing attachment to church and, as he was an ordained minister (no names mentioned) he casually wondered if I'd thought about becoming a Lay Reader. I laughed. And now, here I am talking to you in a church service. You have him to blame.

It's not always the big events that we remember in our personal histories or that kick-start a new way of thinking or persuade someone to change their plans. It's not always a Road to Damascus experience that influences the way our faith and life takes shape.

St Scholastica is the patron saint of nuns; of children with epilepsy and, yes, the patron saint of storms. She proves that throwaway comments can cause storms; storms of change and storms of good in people's lives. Equally, she proves that quick prayers and throwaway comments can bring peace and extend the good times.

Don't underestimate them. Amen