

## Sermon for the third Sunday of Epiphany

Grace Church in Scarborough

Rev David Howells

Date 27 January 2013

A Catholic priest, a United Church minister and a Rabbi are in a railway carriage together. The Rabbi is reading the Torah and the other two are arguing about abortion. They cannot decide about the status of when the egg becomes changed into a person. To and from they go. Finally, unable to decide they disturb the Rabbi. He looks up and they say, "Rabbi, Rabbi. What do you think? When does life begin?" He pauses, thinks, then replies, "When the kids leave home and the dog dies."

When does life begin?

I remember moments of utter boredom as a teenager, feeling trapped at home, thinking about when my life would begin. I remember worrying as a parent about my teenage children, thinking they must make it through this so they are well equipped for when their life begins.

John the Baptist, full of fire and fury, stands beside the waters of Baptism warning people that life with God is soon to begin. He tells of one who will come with fire and spirit to cleanse and clear and judge and bring in the kingdom of heaven. That will be when life begins!

We may not be very comfortable with John's style, but the message still lives on in us. The kingdom of God is not quite yet, we have a while before life with God starts. We have a while to clean up our acts and get ready. "Better get ready, the train's a coming....."

I saw my new Doctor late last week. She reviewed my blood tests. "Your cholesterol is too high." She said. We talked to and fro. No butter, no fatty food, no this no that..... I could feel life opening up before me in a bleak terrain of flavourless uninteresting meals. It would be worth it if I knew I was going to live another 30 years, but....what if I got hit by a truck next year, and I could have had mountains of butter and lakes of full cream. Do I put life on hold in case life is waiting for me later?

Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah picks the verse that every Jewish kid had been taught pointed to the time when LIFE really starts. When the Messiah comes. He read it. Then he sat down.

For me that is the important sentence. "Then he sat down"

When the kingdom comes you will not sit down. You will jump up. Everyone will be on their feet. Surely?

But Jesus sat down. "Today, in your hearing this prophecy is fulfilled."

No Bangs and no flashes. No rolling clouds and angel warriors. No trumpets, no earthquakes....nothing. Just Jesus sitting down.

This is where John the Baptist and Jesus part company, and this is really important teaching.

John makes it easier. He says "Not yet, but soon. Better get ready!"

Jesus says "Right now, right here, already, and for some time."

It is easier to believe that it will all be crystal clear. It will be done for you. It will not require your assent or involvement. It will happen, and you can just be swept along in it.

But Jesus says that it is now and you have to be part of it. "The Kingdom of God is amongst us" Jesus once said and we must live it's hidden truth.

John taught that all wrongs would be righted and all justice settled on the other side of that moment.

Jesus says that we must proclaim good news to the poor today. We must release people from what captivates them this week. We must let people know that this is the year of the Lord's favour. Not next year or one passed, but the one we are in today, right here, this minute.