

Reflection & Newsletter St Mary's & St Augustine's:
Sunday 28th February - 2nd Sunday in Lent.

Bible Readings: *Genesis 17 : 1-7; Romans 4:13-end; Psalm 22 : 23-end;*
Mark 8: 31-end

Reflection for Sunday

It's a natural human response to try and block out those things we don't want to hear – to protect ourselves from the pain of bad news, from things we don't have the capacity to cope with. Over last year we have become accustomed to hearing bad news and many things we do not want to hear – lockdown restrictions, shocking statistics about lives lost, a situation that has turned our world upside down.

Collect for this Sunday
Almighty God,
by the prayer and discipline of Lent
may we enter into the mystery of
Christ's sufferings,
and by following in his Way
come to share in his glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In our gospel reading today Jesus tries to communicate a very unwelcome message to his disciples – his impending suffering, death and resurrection : they don't want to hear it, they challenge it robustly – this is not their world view – their Messiah is coming as a conquering King, restoring the glories of the kingdom of Israel, overthrowing the Roman occupiers – they didn't want to hear Jesus words, they could not comprehend that the person Peter had a few verse earlier acknowledged as “the Christ” (the Messiah) was going to suffer and be killed. They wanted a Messiah they had always imagined, that Israel “expected”, not the suffering servant that Jesus was trying to teach them about .

Jesus demand that his followers should deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him, being prepared to lose their life for the gospel is however exactly what those early disciples were prepared to do – many would go on to be executed for their faith, as have Christians throughout the world in every generation - lost their earthly life for Christ's sake. But what might Jesus' words mean for us in the safety and comfort of the UK . How do we deny ourselves, take up our cross, be prepared to lay down our life for Christ's sake ?

Perhaps it is the challenge for us to consider our priorities, where we expend our time and energy , how we use our money and other resources, how committed we are to prayer, how willing even to talk about or share our faith.

Lockdown and this season of Lent for many of us has opened up a time for reflection, space to think, to address our priorities, remember afresh who and what is important – and to begin to make changes. Perhaps this is one way in which we can respond to Jesus' words in this Gospel reading.

Jesus was prepared to lose his own life that all of us, all people, all creation might receive eternal life, life in all its fullness – this is hope that Paul writes about in Romans, we are put right with and restored in relationship with God through Jesus “He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification.”

The Old Testament readings of this and last Sunday focus on the “everlasting covenants” between God and all people – this is our grounding and our security from which we are called to minister through our ordinary daily lives.

Many of us are weary, but there is hope in sight, the vaccine and “roadmap” out of lockdown; Spring points to signs of new life – springing up regardless of external circumstances – but we still need to take care of ourselves and of one another.

Perhaps we might begin and end each day by being thankful; to take moments throughout the day to notice and appreciate the small things we see and hear; to reach out to smile and speak to someone each day; to show love and care to those we encounter.

I have included on this sheet the final verses of Psalm 22 – it is a Psalm which begins with very familiar words of total desolation “My God, my God why have you forsaken me” but it ends as a great Psalm of praise and trust in God – may we find comfort, faith and renewed resources as we too take moments to seek the Lord.

Psalm 22 v.26 onwards

The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him - may your
hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to
the LORD,

and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to
the LORD

and he rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go
down to the dust will kneel before him - those who
cannot keep themselves alive.

Posterity will serve him;

future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a
people yet unborn:

He has done it!

Our Sunday morning services together will continue on Zoom until at least the end of March – please do ask for help or information if you want to be a part of these. You can join by phone and by computer etc.

Zoom meetings continue though the week during Lent and details can be found on the newsletters.

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