

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 21st March 2021 – Lent 5 – Passion Sunday

Jeremiah 31.31-34; Psalm 51.1-13; Hebrews 5.5-10; John 12.20-33

One of the ways that Christianity spread so quickly, after Jesus had risen from the dead, and after the Disciples had been blessed by the Holy Spirit, was through the network of synagogues around the Greek speaking world. Around the whole of the north and east of the Mediterranean sea, Roman roads and order were allowing good communications, Greek was a common language, and there was a climate of expectation in the synagogues.

That climate of expectation was not just amongst Jews, but also amongst those who gathered around synagogues from other nations, who were attracted by the idea of the one true God. For many people in both groups, the status quo was deeply unsatisfactory. Things like the lack of freedom of the Jewish nation, the implicit contradiction in the idea that the one true God is only interested in one nation, and the unsatisfactory nature of ideas of multiple super-being gods merely squabbling amongst themselves and playing with the world; these were all becoming less and less satisfactory.

All this made the communities around synagogues ready for a new teaching. And I wonder if the many dissatisfactions in our is a sign that people are once again ready for new teaching.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus already knows that his ministry is about more than rescuing the Jewish people. He already knows that his teaching is going to run round the known world like wildfire. So when these educated Greek people, attracted by the Jewish faith, asked to see him, he already knows the significance of this. And so he reflects openly on how his sacrificial death will set this flame of new faith running.

Everything in St John's Gospel is about the light overcoming the darkness, which sets the scene in chapter one in the prologue to his Gospel. The light shines in the darkness of the world, and the darkness does not overcome it. This is the overarching theme of John's Gospel, and the light is of course Jesus.

Then in today's Gospel reading we hear how the darkness of the world, will be overcome by his supreme loving self-sacrifice. The seed will fall to the ground and will be a seed no longer, but it will bear much fruit, and it will change the world. All sorts of people will be drawn to Jesus, by this supreme act of loving service.

Jesus clearly expects Christians to follow his example in living lives of loving service. "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour." It is both a challenge and a promise. God will honour the loving service that Christians give. Loving service is about allowing God to bless us, losing life to find it, eternally in God.

This is what Jesus did, and it is helpful to notice that his service was not about merely doing what others wanted. His service was strong service, serving people in their real need, and

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

not simply giving people what they wanted. True service is not servile. Loving service is about allowing God to bless us, losing life to find it, eternally in God.

This is a hard teaching for our world of today. Increasingly we have been exalting the self, not losing it, in order to try and save it. Self-realisation has become the fashionable imperative, rather than a life of loving service. And it is leading to all sorts of contradictions in how people are seeing themselves and others. It is actually leading to a heightened sense of the vulnerability of self; which people then try to assuage with all sorts of consumerisms, and rampant judgementalism.

For exalting the self does not in fact make anyone happier, but rather just more anxious and more touchy and more judgemental. We see it all around us, and Jesus teaches something fundamentally different.

This growing cult of self-realisation is one of the reasons that Christianity has been having a hard time in our culture in recent decades, for it runs deeply counter to the message of the Cross. The Cross teaches rather, that it is only when we genuinely live to serve others, that we will actually be given the grace to find our true selves. Perhaps one way to understand what being honoured by God means, is that it is about being give the grace to become your best self.

The promise of Jesus, the promise of God, is that when you live a life of loving service, following Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit, God will indeed honour you. Although it may feel at times that you are losing yourself, actually you are finding your best self, which will bear much fruit, and which will endure to eternal life. More than this, you will then also be part of the light that is overcoming the darkness of the world, just like Jesus. Amen.

CJ. 21.03.21