

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 28th February 2021

Genesis 17.1-7,15-16; Psalm 22.23-end; Romans 4.13-end; Mark 8.31-end

In our Gospel reading, Jesus sounds pretty sharp with Peter, perhaps betraying his own tensions about the path he knows he must follow. However Jesus has decided the time has come to explain to his disciples what lies ahead. He knows they will find it difficult, and he knows he must be patient with them.

So it is more likely that Jesus says those words quite warmly, while still being very direct with Peter. Peter, you are thinking in a human way not in God's way. He wants Peter of all the disciples, to take on board what he is saying. So perhaps this it is not so much a telling off, as explaining to a dear friend and colleague, firmly and kindly, that they need to think again.

Jesus is calling his disciples to come on a journey with him, physically to Jerusalem, but more importantly to come on a spiritual journey with him, to discover a new kind of faith in God. Rather than God being a distant authority figure who demands loyalty and good behaviour or else, which is really just a projection of what most human minds think of as ultimate authority, Jesus calls his disciples, and that means us too, to discover that God is actually not like that.

Rather the love of God, gives us a very different perspective, and in his journey to the Cross and beyond, Jesus knows he is being called to reveal this radical new faith in the God who first and foremost loves, always. He knows that this new faith will challenge many things that people think they know about God. He knows that this new faith will be resisted, particularly by the religious authorities, who are rather found of all the business of authority, and he knows where this will lead for himself.

But Jesus also knows that his faith in this true God will not be disappointed. In the same way as we present day disciples of Jesus follow him all the way to Jerusalem during Lent. As we continue our own daily journeys with Jesus, to discover more and more about this new kind of faith in God, and how it can transform our lives. As we discover how we can lose our lives for the sake of Jesus and the gospel, in order to save them. As we too learn how we can indeed trust in the love of our heavenly Father as Jesus did. We too will not be disappointed.

But we have to be ready to make this spiritual journey with Jesus. This is what Jesus is being so direct about in our Gospel reading today. And he is warning that without this openness, without this willingness to understand God in new ways, to know God in new ways, we shall just get bogged down in the old ways and left behind. And so Jesus talks to his Disciples, for the first time, about people taking up their cross. Of course we hear this as alluding to the cross on which Jesus was crucified, but to understand what this phrase really means we have first to think about another kind of cross.

Nomadic people, people whose life is a journey, often a spiritual journey as well as a physical journey, people who live in tents, they had a cross. Actually lots of them. These were flat crosses on top of poles that kept up the middle of their tents. And when they moved on,

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when they made their journeys, they had to strike their tents, and carry their cross, to a new place. The cross on which Jesus died invites us to do the same thing, and carry our cross on a spiritual journey. It's not an invitation somehow to assist in the redemption of the world. That was something only God could do, only Jesus could do. It's not an indication that following Jesus is always burdensome. Jesus assured people that his burden is light. It is though, an invitation to strike camp, and go on a spiritual journey, with Jesus.

The Christian cross is a sign which invites the whole world to come on a journey to discover who God really is, to learn to know God in new ways. But to go on this journey, you have to be ready to strike camp first, and then carry your cross to a new place. Amen.

CJ. 28.02.21