

Morning Worship Service
Sunday 28th February 2021
Lent 2

Introduction

We have come to the city of the living God,
to the heavenly Jerusalem,
with thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

Alleluia

We have come to God the judge of all,
to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.

Alleluia

SONG

Together we pray:

Lord, direct our thoughts,
teach us to pray,
lift up our hearts to worship you
in Spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Confession

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our sins in penitence
and faith.

Together we confess our sins to Almighty God:

God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins:
For turning away from you and ignoring your will for our lives:
For behaving just as we wish, without thinking of you:
For failing you by what we do, think and say:
For letting ourselves be drawn away from you by temptations in the world around us:
For living as if we were ashamed to belong to your Son:
Father, forgive us, save us and help us. Amen.

Absolution

May God who is both power and love,
Forgive us and free us from our sins,
Heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
And raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect

Reading

Mark 8: 31-end

Jesus Tells About His Coming Death

Jesus then began to teach his disciples. He taught them that the Son of Man must suffer many things. He taught them that the elders would not accept him. The chief priests and the teachers of the law would not accept him either. He must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke clearly about this. Peter took Jesus to one side and began to scold him.

Jesus turned and looked at his disciples. He scolded Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You are not thinking about the things God cares about. Instead, you are thinking only about the things humans care about."

Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples. He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must say no to themselves. They must pick up their cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the good news will save it. What good is it if someone gains the whole world but loses their soul? Or what can anyone trade for their soul? Suppose anyone is ashamed of me and my words among these adulterous and sinful people. Then the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Sermon

When I looked at the scripture for today, I thought, 'Oh my goodness! There are so many strands here – what on earth should I focus on?' For example.....

- We have Jesus telling the disciples very clearly what the future holds for him.
- We have Peter's knee jerk reaction to the news and Jesus' stern rebuke in response.
- And we have Jesus calling the crowds to him and giving them more 'hard teaching'.

So, in the end, I decided to think a little bit about each of those threads.

Sometimes we can spend time wondering what the future holds for us. For some, this desire leads them to spiritualists to try and find out. For Christians to do this is definitely a 'No! No!' In his word, God clearly forbids us to go there! And, besides, it certainly wouldn't always be beneficial to know what was going to happen in our lives.

I'm very grateful that when our Matt was a little boy, I had no idea we would be dealing with the sorrow of him having incurable cancer as he's entering middle age. The pain of that knowledge is pretty much unbearable now, so not having to carry it all his 41 years has been a blessing.

But because Jesus is God, he already knows what horror (regarding the crucifixion), and subsequent glory (regarding the resurrection), awaits him. After all, that's the whole reason he came to earth as a human being in the first place – to die for our sins! However, he didn't want to lead the disciples astray. He knew that their interpretation

of a Messiah was a king like the Old Testament King David.....and he definitely wasn't in that ilk! So here, he starts preparing them for the reality they will have to live through not that far away. He tells them that he is a suffering Messiah!

We are called to tell others about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and, like Jesus, we must do it honestly. Yes, in my opinion, the Christian life is the best choice anyone could ever make; but it's not a road paved with wealth and ease.

It usually involves hard work (especially in the area of changing our mind sets to become more Christ-like) and for many it brings persecution, deprivation and deep suffering. People need to know that following Jesus is not the easy option. If we don't tell them that fact, we're only giving them half the story! I'll say more on that in a minute.

Then we have Peter. Wonderful Peter! Why did Peter react the way he did?

Well, Peter was often the spokesman for the rest of the disciples and I'm sure he just said what all the rest of them were thinking.

Previously to this conversation, while Jesus was in the desert, Satan had tried very hard to deflect him from his appointed mission for the salvation of all people. He wanted to prevent him from going to the cross; and so, prevent us from receiving eternal life.

Satan's motives were evil, and he knew exactly what he was trying to achieve.

Unknowingly, the disciples were trying to stop Jesus going to the cross as well, but, unlike Satan, they were motivated by love and admiration for Jesus. Peter, nor the others I suspect, was not considering God's purposes but only his own natural desires and feelings. He only saw part of the picture.

We must not make the same mistake.

The crucifixion was horrendous; but we live in a time when we know that it was necessary so that we could be released from the bondage of our sins. While often it's hard, we must stay focused on the fact that God can bring good out of apparent evil – like the resurrection following the crucifixion. And, poor Peter – having to hear that stinging rebuke from Jesus! But we know that Jesus was tempted just as we are; and we know from his time in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus would have preferred to avoid the death that awaited him. If anyone is under the impression that going to the cross was 'a piece of cake' for Jesus, they need to think again – it was anything but!

Here, Jesus was making it clear to those closest to him that he would not be swayed away from what was ordained before him. It was God's, and therefore his, will that these things should take place.

And, finally, we have the 'hard teaching' – all this stuff about taking up a cross. The Romans were Mark's original audience and they knew exactly what taking up the cross meant!!

As you probably know, death on a cross was a form of execution used by Rome for dangerous criminals: and a prisoner was made to carry his own cross to the place of execution as a sign of submission to Rome's power.

Here, Jesus uses what would have been a familiar sight to the people of the time (criminals carrying their crosses) to illustrate the ultimate submission required of his followers. He is not against pleasure (after all, a few weeks ago we saw him at a wedding); nor is he saying that we should seek pain needlessly. He is talking about the huge, and often heroic, effort needed to follow him moment by moment – to do his will and not ours when that choice is difficult, or the future looks bleak.

So, as an example, Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that we are to forgive others, regardless of their deeds against us or those we know, or things we see people do further afield; something like genocide. In following Jesus, forgiving others (and ourselves I might add) is not an option we can pick up and put down depending on our personal judgement of the deed! It's a command to forgive always, all the time, and it's one that's never easy to adhere to. Many people fall away from the Christian faith because they cannot accept this part of the teaching.

There isn't time today to talk about losing our lives to save them but I'd just like us to note the stark warning right at the end of the reading.

Jesus says that if anyone is ashamed of him and his teaching in this life then he will be ashamed of them when he returns in glory.

Put another way, Jesus never forces us to choose him during our lives on earth. If we decide not to choose him in the here and now, then he won't be choosing us to be with him in eternity.

Make no mistake about it, Jesus will always be the right choice.

Creed

**We believe and trust in God the Father,
who made all things.**

**We believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ,
who redeemed the world.**

**We believe and trust in his Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God.**

This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Intercessions

Intercessions for Lent 2 (2021)

Jesus, Saviour of the world, you embraced the way of sacrificial love. Give your Church faith and courage to follow you wherever you lead.

May we be witnesses to you by facing each day with joy because of your saving grace. Help us to be content and secure in the future you want us to follow and give us an awareness and sensitivity to recognise where you are leading. May we constantly hear your voice saying 'This is the path. Walk in it'. Lift our eyes to see and focus on you

when disappointment of heartache comes crashing in. May we be willing to be poured out as an offering in your service.

Jesus, Saviour of the world, we ask that you lift up leaders in all walks of life who will dedicate themselves to the common good. In the heat of conflicting convictions keep them in truth and integrity. We ask that you bestow upon all governments wisdom and discretion as they endeavour to bring their countries safely out of Lockdown. We especially ask, even though the future looks bleak for so many near and far who have lost their jobs and livelihoods, that new and unexpected employment will be found so that the burden of 'making ends meet' will be minimised. Jesus, Saviour of the world, in you all peoples are one, but most live their lives contrary to that.

We ask that you strengthen the bonds that create cohesive and peaceful communities. Give to all a greater desire to work together in harmony. Put an end to all the in-fighting which goes on behind the scenes in all levels of government – the very people who should be setting an example. Today we remember the many communities where brutal conflicts are ongoing; where people live in fear for their lives and where many put no value on the lives of others. We ask especially that you will protect the young, the elderly and the vulnerable.

Jesus, Saviour of the world, pour out your healing blessings on all who are ill or weakened. We pray for those who are in physical pain; those who are in mental anguish; those who are grieving with broken hearts. We name them silently now.....Meet them, we pray, at their point of greatest need. Fill them with your joy and gladness and give them hope for the future.

Let us continue in prayer saying together the words our Saviour taught us:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

SONG

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.