

READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY 30 AUGUST 2020
12th Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 26.1-8

- 1 Give judgement for me, O Lord,
for I have walked with integrity; ♦
- I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.
- 2 Test me, O Lord, and try me; ♦
examine my heart and my mind.
- 3 For your love is before my eyes; ♦
I have walked in your truth.
- 4 I have not joined the company of the false, ♦
nor consorted with the deceitful.
- 5 I hate the gathering of evildoers ♦
and I will not sit down with the wicked.
- 6 I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, ♦
that I may go about your altar,
- 7 To make heard the voice of thanksgiving ♦
and tell of all your wonderful deeds.
- 8 Lord, I love the house of your habitation ♦
and the place where your glory abides.

Romans 12.9-21

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16. 21-28

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Reflection – this week, from Mary-Lou

Before I came to Severn Loop, I used to look after people in Hereford Diocese who offered themselves for ordained ministry. So I spent a lot of time listening to people's stories and helping them test their vocations. I was privileged to get to know William. William is lovely, and a highly gifted, pure mathematician. I am not! One day I asked him to talk to me about the Holy Trinity. He proceeded to give me an illustration of the Trinity drawn from pure mathematics. It took me into three and four dimensions, and he explained it with such clarity I was completely transfixed! I felt a whole new understanding of the Trinity opening up for me! And then at very moment William stopped talking, all that wonder, all that clarity – well, it was gone, in a trice! So much for me and pure maths ...

I think something like that happened to Peter in our Gospel reading. Last week we heard about that extraordinary moment he shared with Jesus, when Peter had the understanding to know he was the Messiah! Wonders followed: Peter received from Jesus his new name, became the rock on which the church would be built, and was even given the keys of the kingdom of heaven!

Then almost immediately, it all goes wrong again. As Jesus tries to prepare the disciples for his suffering and death, Peter takes him on one side and says God forbid! Then he hears that terrible denunciation from Jesus's lips: Get behind me, Satan! Yes, Peter has had the clarity to recognise the Messiah, but he still doesn't really understand. Perhaps Peter can't cope with the idea of a Messiah who's come to die? Perhaps he can't face losing his Master? What pain, to be rebuked by Jesus in this way. How demolished, how small, Peter must have felt. But Jesus has to make it absolutely clear to his disciples, this way of the cross is the only way – the only way for Jesus himself, and the only way for those who follow him.

The life of faith can be very like it was for Peter – one moment we gain a glimpse of God that leaves us sure, with some new understanding of who God is, and then in a flash, God seems to have left us behind and we lose it again. In his poem 'Pilgrimages', the poet R S Thomas says: He is such a fast God, always ... leaving as we arrive. God just refuses to stay still and fit in the boxes we feel we need to keep God in. God is mysterious, and as the old hymn tells us, God moves in mysterious ways! Peter had to learn that the Messiah was never going to do it his way. But he also learned that although Jesus rebuked him, he did still have a part to play in the great future God was unfolding around him.

Here is good news for us too. Even when we don't get it, even when we lose our certainty because the mists descend and we lose sight of our fast God, who has slipped on ahead, through God's mercy and grace we can still go on, even in our weakness and frailty. We don't need an 'ology', just faith enough to take the next step in God's company. And William? Well I'm delighted to tell you William was ordained. And my brief foray into advanced mathematics rests there in that wonderful conversation we had so many years ago!