



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2021 – 2nd SUNDAY OF LENT

COLLECT

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.
Amen.

Psalm 22.23-end

23 Praise the Lord, you that fear him; ♦
O seed of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, O seed of Israel.
24 For he has not despised nor abhorred the suffering of the poor;
neither has he hidden his face from them; ♦
but when they cried to him he heard them.
25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation; ♦
I will perform my vows
in the presence of those that fear you.
26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied; ♦
those who seek the Lord shall praise him;
their hearts shall live for ever.
27 All the ends of the earth
shall remember and turn to the Lord, ♦
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
28 For the kingdom is the Lord's ♦
and he rules over the nations.
29 How can those who sleep in the earth
bow down in worship, ♦
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?
30 He has saved my life for himself;
my descendants shall serve him; ♦
this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.

31 They shall come and make known his salvation,
to a people yet unborn, ♦
declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

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Gen 17.1-7 & 15-16

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Mark 8.31-end

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Reflection - this week from Hannah

Our reading today begins with a difficult conversation. Jesus 'spoke plainly', we hear, about his coming death... and resurrection. At first glance, it feels rather as though Peter found plain speaking about death unseemly or inappropriate... even taboo. That certainly resonates with our culture- social scientists, therapists and counsellors are all familiar with the phenomenon of what's sometimes been called the 'don't talk daft' effect- typically this is when someone wants to talk about their own mortality and its implications, and they are cut-off, denied, with a phrase like 'don't talk daft' or 'let's not think about that' because it feels too difficult.

In this encounter we are reminded that whilst we might shirk the inevitability and reality of death, Jesus doesn't. Peter rebuked him for speaking of it; but Jesus spoke all the louder, and all the broader after his interjection.

But though there are resonances with our reticence to speak of certain things, the context wasn't really the same. When we step out from this account, we remember that just before today's words, Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah- away from the crowd in Caesarea Philippi where Pagan worship was rife, his identity had been revealed by his friend in response to that question 'who do you say that I am?'. And that had come from Peter's experience of seeing that Jesus was no ordinary person- he performed miracles, healings, he seemed to be heading on a straight upwards trajectory to glory, wonder, joy... jubilee and celebration and rescue and nothing else.

And then... and then that narrative was blown apart by words about crosses and death and mystery and the cost of discipleship that were not promising ease, but suffering. It's almost too obvious to say, but of course at this point, the disciples and the crowds had not yet experienced the horrors of Jesus' crucifixion. So, when they heard this talk of crosses- of taking up their cross to follow Jesus, what must it have drawn up in them? Well, crosses were for the oppressed people groups- Roman citizens couldn't be crucified. Crucifixion was a slow, shameful, public death. Everyone would have known about the walk with the cross through the streets, the humiliation, the protracted torture, the instrument used for crimes against empire that held subjects in fear and compliance. What part did that have, does that have, for those of us who follow in the way- who are committed to sharing Christ's story?

A few weeks back we heard the story of the wedding at Cana- and the connotations there about the intimate relationship we are invited into with Christ finding some echoes in the sacrament of marriage. In some ways, the same is going on here- Jesus is reminding us that his way is one that contains suffering as well as joy- and its for the long haul. A bit like those wedding vows 'for better, for worse'. And of course, unlike the disciples at this point in the Gospel, we are stood the other side of the cross- our

understanding of it is caught up in our understanding of Jesus. 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'

That's where our path leads in Lent, and in all times- if we are to take up the way of the cross, we are not accepting the easy path, but a quite different one where, as the hymn puts it, sorrow and love flow mingled down, and where we are in the company of Jesus, always, and openly so- for crucifixion was nothing if not public. Do you remember Simon of Cyrene- who carried Jesus' cross when he was too weak to do so? That often happened, and again, there in that image is the encouragement that we are never alone- and can share one another's burdens- joys and sorrows- and we can share in the life of Christ too.

Just after that rather difficult verse about denying ourselves, taking up our crosses and following, we hear something uplifting, paradoxical and mysterious. Jesus says 'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it'. Christ tells us, that separation from him is what follows from denying the way of the cross and its path to death. Jesus' point is that in following in his footsteps, wherever that takes us and however undulating the path, even death cannot and will not separate us from him. So to follow in this way, is the way of life in all its fullness.

Amen.