

Reflection and Prayers for 28th February 2021

Romans 4.13-25

¹³The promise that Abraham would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'). Abraham believed in the presence of the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.' ²³Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Gospel Mark 8.31-38

³¹Jesus began to teach his disciples 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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.'

³⁴He 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.'

³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those 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

“Take up their cross and follow me.”

What a strange thing to say. Jesus, and of course those around him at the time would be well aware of the way of execution practiced by the Romans. The cross was an easy way to both get rid of criminals and serve as a warning to others about what they would face if they did not obey, keep the laws, and respect the Romans.

Not only that Jesus is talking about his own death and resurrection only moments before, but to take up their crosses in the context of this passage is daunting. Take up the means of your death and bring it with you as you come with me. Take up the burdens that are yours and bring them along for the adventure of being part of those who were Jesus’ supporters.

Our faith makes much of freedom, forgiveness, and love. I wonder how many of us would want the children and friends around us to be released from carrying their means of death around with them rather than commending them to carry it with them?

This is an important passage when we consider how faith can be manipulated and abused. Once someone who had started going to church, suddenly stopped. When I was able to chat with them, I was astounded to hear “Well I gave God six months to get me to win the lottery, and He didn’t, so what is the point of church and God?”

Jesus does not promise a lottery win, or a perfect life without stress or hurt. Jesus does not operate a merchandising stand offering things in exchange for our support. Why would we follow someone whose whole desire is to SELL something in response to payment of an unreal impossible or at best improbable life?

Oh, but I do know that is EXACTLY how so many folk do live, following the on-trend fashions and people, being swayed by the promise of our identity being revealed and settled by what we buy, what we earn, what we own. Of course, faith in these circumstances can be bought, bartered, and bargained with. But you cannot buy love can you?

The point of the life death and resurrection is that this is a freely given gift for anyone to receive. This is an act of love, from the moment of the incarnation to the moment of the ascension. This is an act of faith in the ability of God’s people to recognise the hope and life that is in Christ. God takes the world as it is and loves it into the potential it has to become a means of grace and love. God takes people as they are and loves them into the way that they can be.

God taking us as we are means that we must accept for ourselves the reality of all of who we are, which includes the things that are our burdens, our crosses to bear. If Jesus calls us to follow him while carrying our crosses which leads to our death, perhaps we can remember that he leads us into freedom and new life. We cannot simply leave the things that are our Kryptonite because they are part of who we are. We are not snakes shedding our once used skin.

Instead, we are a people who no longer have a fear of death, or in shame about the things that can so easily control us and lead us to death. With Christ, who offers to help us with our burdens, we can with Christ become the masters of our lives instead of being enslaved to our sin. So as Christ is proclaimed to make the cross of pain and sin to be a means of life, so the crosses we carry can be transformed from death to life.

So, with confidence we can pick up our cross, with confidence we can follow Christ. With confidence we can look forward in hope, faith and love knowing that for us death is not to be feared for Christ is with us and promises to bring us to his Father's house. For God loves us perfectly even though we can never be perfect.

So, carrying the means of our death is just about being true to ourselves, accepting all that we are is loved and valued by God. For Christ came to lead us to life here and into eternity. So, our cross is does not define us totally. It does not hold us ransom. Recognising that through the cross of Christ means that God knows the challenge and cost of our burdens. Our crosses will never become too much, too heavy, too disabling as long as we share the burden with Christ. Thanks be to God!

A prayer at the beginning of Lent:

Your Word reveals to us a simple truth,
that sin entered this world through human folly
in believing we could be like you,
and permeated history through envy, selfishness and greed.
Yet sin, which holds us tight within its grasp
cannot resist a heart that is touched by your grace through Jesus Christ,
cannot contend with Living Water pouring into hearts and souls.
Your Word reveals to us a simple truth, that sin is defeated
and we can become the people we were always meant to be,
by your grace through Jesus Christ.

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Intercessions for Lent 2

28th February by Brian Simpson

Knowing that God understands what is best for us, let us pray to Him in faith.

Heavenly Father give to us as a Church the faith and courage to follow Jesus wherever He will lead us. We pray that we may trust you, as we move forward into a new stage of Christian witness. Help us to work and pray together as we search out your plan for us.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray that you will raise up world leaders who will dedicate themselves to the good of all. Give them the courage to be truthful and just, in their powerfulness to be humble, and be ever ready to learn. May your healing power and justice be seen throughout the world.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In all our relationships and interactions may we seek to spread your love. Help us to listen, support, and comfort all those we come into contact with. May our time of Lent be a time of positive action for the good of those around us. Show us how we can be a channel of your love. We pray too for Vanda as she prepares to set out on the path along which you are guiding her. May your strength and support be ever surrounding her.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

In these months of uncertainty pour your healing power on all who suffer. Give peace to the anxious, and reassurance to the afraid. May we all remember your loving care for us through both the good and distressing experiences of our lives.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We remember all those who have died and commend them to your gracious mercy. May they live forever in the joy of your presence.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We thank you that you are always here beside us and constant in your love for us.

Merciful Father **accept these prayers for the sake of you Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**