

Passion Sunday 21st March (Lent 5) 2021 – ‘Do what is right, not what is easy’ Fr. Mike.

- **Jeremiah 31.31-34 - A new covenant**

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- **Hebrews 5. 5-10 – A priest forever**

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but *it was* He who said to Him: *“You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.”* As He also says in another place: *“You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek”*; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest *“according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

- **John 12. 20-23 – where is Jesus?**

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

Prayer

Spirit of integrity,

You drive us into the desert to search out the truth.

Give us clarity to know what is right, and courage to reject what is merely expedient;

That we may abandon the false innocence of failing to choose at all,

Drawing from the deep well of your Passion, the purposes of God. Amen.

This week we are trying to think together about the Passion of Christ; and I expect we all find ourselves up against a difficulty. Sometimes, it all seems so remote from our ordinary life that it appears rather unreal, and in a way, irrelevant?

Perhaps the mental effort to 'think ourselves back' as it were, over two-thousand and twenty years is likely to strain the average imagination to breaking point. If this is your difficulty, consider this: **we do not have to try and bridge the gulf which separates that day from this** by some trick of imagination or play on our emotions. It is much more simple and immediate than that! As you approach the passion narrative hinted at in the Gospel for this week by the words '**the hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified,**' why not quietly reflect that the chief actor in it is not simply a rather remote historical figure, but a living reality who holds us in his mind and heart AT THIS VERY MOMENT as we *try* to hold him in ours...

Try to look at it this way - All that stirred in the heart of Jesus then, as he went forward to his passion, stirs in his heart now. All the motives that impelled him then, are active in him now – for he is the same Christ; 'yesterday, today and for ever.' If you come to church and experience the liturgy on Holy Saturday (when this passion season closes) you will join an ancient service which reminds us in many ways that HE DOES NOT CHANGE AS WE DO.

Consequently, we need not worry, nor be afraid that we shall find him in a different mood from that of calvary, because the comforting truth persists - namely that **what he was then, he is now!**

And then, against this backdrop there is ourselves... and the only essential thing to grasp in our Lenten journey is that we are required to be **absolutely sincere**. So, please do not pretend to have fine feelings that you do not possess; do not pretend to be any different from what you are. It is no good whatsoever pretending when we are with Him. This is why the

company of our Lord is so restful, because with Christ we do not have to go on trying to keep up appearances. He already knows the contents of our hearts...

Your best starting point will be to come to Jesus then, simply as you are now.

“It is full great pleasure to our gracious Lord when we come to him simply, plainly, and homely” (Lady Julian of Norwich). And when we do, when we confront each other, we realise that the Passion is not limited to a far-off historical event. It becomes instead a present reality in which we are all participants, not merely actors or (even worse), passive spectators.

The passion of Christ is the inevitable conflict between God’s self-giving love and our selfish egotism. Our self-centredness can become so ingrained into our spiritual DNA that *even when we love* there is a streak of self-love in it – at least until our love has come under the dominion of His grace. So, we clamour for love in return and complain bitterly if we do not get it, often behaving as if we only loved at all for what we hoped to get out of it.

How limiting and demandingly possessive our love can be!

But when God loves, he simply, loves...

God (who is Love itself) wants to be loved but *does not love in order to be loved*; or cease loving if not loved! God loves for the sake of loving, and even when we throw his love back in his face, the truly amazing divine response is (incredulously perhaps) to continue loving “...having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (John.13.1) Consequently, the conflict between his divine love and our self-centredness continues...

Although at first glance, the Passion drama from a modern perspective is plain straight forward history, the actors in it also have a representative character. It will only take a small amount of self-knowledge then, to recognise ourselves in those characters described in the Passion?

Most people see themselves as unremarkable, or 'normal', and would even perhaps describe themselves as 'ordinary.' There is of course a natural humility in this approach, and there is certainly nothing wrong with being perceived as 'average.'

One of the most startling aspects of the Passion is that it was planned and executed by AVERAGE humanity. It was not that our Lord was particularly unfortunate in suffering at the hands of particularly wicked men. They were simply ordinary folk, committing their ordinary, everyday sins who crucified our Lord. [it would have been just the same – it IS the same, today!]

For example, the sins of the Pharisees were the sins of religious people who sometimes became self-righteous or developed spiritual blindness, and pride. They were sure they were right and everyone else was wrong; even managing to sanctify their arrogance with piety. Those sins, whilst never popular, are disturbingly common among religious people.

History shows that the practices of religion are frequently mistaken for the religion itself, and underneath outward conformity and regular attendance at church, some have remained hard, selfish, or unloving. If we are honest, we are all at times guilty of this to a greater or lesser degree? (as our BCP prayer of humble access reminds us – we are 'not worthy to gather up the crumbs under thy table')...

Holy men

There is nothing new in the worldliness and selfishness of the Sadducees and Priests. Men's eyes have often been blinded by self-interest as they cling to power and privileges. (How many have said, "you've got to look after yourself, because if you don't nobody else will!")

Rulers and Officials – sacrament of irresponsibility

The sin of Pontius Pilate was the sin of smothering his conscience for the sake of expediency. It would not have been diplomatic to obey his conscience and do what he knew

to be right. It was after all, a matter of 'policy' and he *could not afford* to do the right thing, as he might have said. Therefore, he tried to disclaim responsibility for what he knew was wrong and celebrated a sort of 'sacrament of irresponsibility' by publicly washing his hands.

Although we cannot do that – how often have we tried to do the same?

The soldiers at calvary

What about the soldiers who actually crucified our Lord? They were no better or worse than other soldiers – simply 'doing their job.'

How often have we made the same excuse for doing what in our hearts we know very well to be wrong?

A close friend of Jesus – then and now?

Not even Judas was a monster of iniquity compared with other men. He merely set himself, his own personal interest and ambition at the centre of his life. It was simply disappointed pride which led to that terrible act of treachery in the Garden of Gethsemane. So, as we approach Holy Week once again, it might be wise to reflect upon the following question:

How much of human life in 2021 is a regular and faithful reproduction of the behaviour of Judas?

