

Palm Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – Sunday 5th April 2020

Matthew 21.1-11; Isaiah 50.4-9a; Philippians 2.5-11; Matthew 27.11-54

Today, as the daily statistics of the reaping wrought by Coronavirus continue to increase, not just here in the UK but also around the world, people are being filled with fear and apprehension about what is to come. None of us can be sure upon what shore this fierce storm will cast us; ourselves, our families, our nation; those we love and care for, and the ways of life we know and love. None of us can be sure; we have to face that.

On this day, Palm Sunday, the first disciples knew that there was a storm coming and were also filled with foreboding. They had great hopes, but they also had great fears. And their leader, Jesus, had frightened them. He had set his face towards Jerusalem, madness they thought, and they had tried to persuade him to stay in Galilee. He told them plainly that he was going to die, and they were uncomprehending. And when they tried to dissuade him, Jesus was remarkably sharp with them, calling them children of the Devil. No wonder one of them betrayed him.

But they stayed with Jesus, and followed him to Jerusalem with fear and foreboding. And also trust. Trust that somehow the new life he spoke of constantly in strange ways, would eventually bring joy and relief. They had encountered that new life in many ways as they travelled with Jesus, as they became friends, as they began to discover remarkable things about themselves, as he set them free. And today on Palm Sunday, with Jesus' encouragement, they allowed themselves some hope and excitement. But still, they knew the storm was coming, and they did not know, could not know, upon what shore it would eventually cast them.

Nevertheless, they trusted Jesus. They only ran away when they knew they could no longer help him, and even then they probably trusted that he had something up his sleeve. The disciples, both the women and the men, loved and trusted Jesus, and Jesus loved and trusted his heavenly Father. We, today, too, are called to love and trust God as we face the days and weeks ahead. For whatever shore we are cast upon, we also know that we will remain always in God's love.

God is faithful, and as St Paul so emphatically affirmed in his letter to the Romans (chapter 8) nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Whatever happens to us as Christians, whatever difficulties we may face, whatever heartaches we may suffer, nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death. In these days, such knowledge can give us courage, resolution and compassion, and faith can lead us away from being ruled by fear.

How else can the faith of Jesus in the love of God help us, and also help our communities at this time?

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

There is a real risk that, as fatalities continue, as restrictions continue, as livelihoods are threatened, as the heartaches crash in; that people will be consumed with rage. Rage that the nation was not better prepared. Rage that life is not as comfortable as we had planned it, expected it, and worked for it to be. And rage that many will have died of the virus. Such rage is understandable, for it is the first time in living memory, in the time of modern medicine, that we have had to face inevitable mortality in such a stark and helpless way. And of course people are disappointed, of course people feel let down, and of course that makes us all a bit cross.

However, rage doesn't really help, as toddlers and teenagers eventually learn; though some people never manage to grow out of habitual raging. There is a visceral satisfaction in rage, but it is short lived and ultimately unsatisfactory. Hatred is the same. Visceral and satisfying for a time, but ultimately fruitless. Rather the energy of rage needs to be turned to more positive and fruitful ends.

One key to this is admitting sorrow. Sorrow is real. It's about grieving. We can be honest about sorrow; we need to be honest about sorrow. Sorrow for those whom we have lost and what we ourselves have lost. Sorrow for mistakes and foolishness. Sorrow for sin. Sorrow for whatever. But whereas in rage and hatred we are apt struggle to maintain perspective, sorrow is the truth of the matter. Moreover it is the truth that sets people free, though we often doubt it and fear it.

The love of God, our faith in the love of God, which holds us come what may, will help us hold our sorrows honestly, help us accept the truths that we fear, and help us to have compassion on the fallible humanity in which we all share, and to avoid the blame game.

There is a reason, you know, why flying is the safest form of transport ever. It's because whenever something goes wrong and people die, everyone has learnt that in order to get to the truth, in order to learn the lessons well, rage and blame have no place. Because when they reign, everyone becomes defensive, and they cover up and keep quiet and then don't learn the right things. In aviation, when things go wrong, no one automatically loses their job, no one has to take the blame, for everyone wants to learn from the mistakes, so as to be able to avoid them in future. It has become the text book example of the best kind of safety culture.

When this storm is passed, as it will; when the cost is counted, as we will; we need to learn the lessons and learn them well. We need to learn again how to live less for today and more for tomorrow, how to take future risks more seriously, rather than just hoping for the best and thinking only short term. And it is no good expecting political leaders to do this, if the people are not ready to think in this way too, not in a democracy anyway.

For now there are the heroes and heroines in the fight to manage and mitigate and endure the Coronavirus pandemic. For now we can do what it takes to support them, the sick, and one another. For now we can have courage and discipline and compassion. And the wonderful gift that is Christian faith; faith in Jesus, faith in the love of God, faith in the good

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

purposes of God in bringing light out of darkness; can and will bring us real hope. God is faithful. The disciples did lose hope for a short while, but Jesus never did.

The journey of faith that we follow in Holy Week has much to teach us and our nation at this time. Yes let us be sorrowful, yes let us be strong; but let us not lose hope, and let us not fear the truth of what is to come. Rather let us trust God and learn the right lessons. Amen.

CJ. 05.04.20