

Sermon 28 February 2021 Second Sunday in Lent.

Reverend Irene

Mark 8 31-38

Our Gospel reading Jesus is no longer in the wilderness, but his temptations continue. This time from one of his followers – Peter, who leads the way for all of us in the way he gets things wrong. In our Explore the Book sessions we have been reading Mark’s Gospel which tells us enthusiastically of the things Jesus did to reveal his purpose for coming into the world. Not only was he healing the sick and teaching the people a new way to live, he was also teaching his disciples to be leaders, teachers and healers themselves. Although they repeatedly missed the point and had to have things explained, almost in words of one syllable, Mark takes us to the crucial moment when Jesus asked his followers if they truly understood who he was, leading to one of Peter’s finest moments. “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”.

However, in today we find Peter in confusion and denial again as Jesus talks of his forthcoming arrest and crucifixion at the hands of the religious establishment and the Roman authorities. This is news that those close to Jesus found shocking and difficult to believe, we can hear the disbelief in Peter’s voice when he says, but you are the Messiah, you came to save us from tyranny and oppression!

I’m not accusing Peter or the disciples of being obtuse. I **know** the story of Jesus and his suffering as passed down the generations for over 2000 years and it **is** hard to take in, so imagine how the people standing listening to Jesus felt. This man was a Rabbi, preacher and healer, a Godly man, yet here he was telling them he was going to face a degrading, grisly end on a cross.

Who wouldn’t be shocked?

No matter how often we hear the story, or how familiar the words become, we too should be shocked.

Then, while the disciples are trying to process **that** information, Jesus gives them another challenge. If any of you want to become my followers, you must deny yourselves, take up your own cross and follow me.

We’ve all heard the expression “, a cross we have to bear”, used when someone is going through a difficult time, or may be as a throw-away comment for something frivolous. The truth is that during our lives we all pass through difficult times, and we do so with prayer and trust in God that in the end all will be well.

It is almost a year since the nation entered the first period of lockdown and who would have imagined that as we enter another Spring we would still be living with disruption and restriction to our way of life. Who would have thought so many people would lose their lives, or suffer permanent health problems? Who would have seen the loss of education and jobs, the closure of places of worship, lack of family contact and so much more? We may

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not be living with the innate fear we had at the beginning of the pandemic, but the heavy cross of Covid 19 has not gone away. It is only by the sacrifice of most people, and the ingenuity and hard work of the scientists, and those that make our rules, that we are able to see the light at the end of a very long tunnel. Many countries are far behind us, the world will take a long time to recover.

So what does the cross we have borne collectively this year have to do with the cross of Jesus?

The answer for some people unfortunately is very little.

But most of us **have** denied ourselves and borne the isolation and disruption caused by Covid, because we **have had to** in following government guidelines to deal with a global pandemic.

To bear the cross of Christ is different.

It is different because in doing so, we **willingly** deny ourselves to live with true love and compassion for those in need, not just those we know. Every time we open our hearts to the suffering stranger, the lost and the desolate people in the world, every time we look beyond our own desires to the greater needs of the world, we come closer to Jesus and the understanding of what he meant about taking up our cross to follow him.

In the long run, anything we need to deny ourselves to follow Christ, will be nothing compared to what he did for us. If we continually put our trust in Him to fulfil the promises he makes, as Abraham did in our first reading, the gift we receive will be the joy of being with him forever.

Amen