

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 17 March 2024 - The Fifth Sunday of Lent (Passiontide begins)

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Jeremiah 31.31-34; Psalm 51.1-13 or Psalm 119.9-16; Hebrews 5.5-10; John 12.20-33

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Sarah Tan, Chaplain, HMP Littlehey

'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'

I hope that is something that all Christians whether brand new to faith or with a lifelong devotion to God or somewhere between those two extremes can still claim to want. We wish to see Jesus. For the Greeks in today's reading, they were asking for the chance to see or speak with Jesus in person. They were asking for an audience with Jesus if you like. Jesus knew that this was now the beginning of the journey he must undertake to the humiliation of crucifixion to the tomb and then to rise again, as Jesus explained to his disciples Philip and Andrew. He knew that the time had come for 'the Son of Man to be glorified.' We have the benefit of knowing the whole story, of knowing that the events of what we now call Holy Week were necessary to reach the desolation of Good Friday, the emptiness of Holy Saturday before the glory and wonder of Easter Day when indeed the Son of Man, Jesus would be glorified.

The image of the single grain of wheat needing to fall to the earth in order to grow and produce much fruit is a powerful one, isn't it? It speaks of the power of what happens in secret in the depths of the earth, of the power and spirit of God at work in the darkness to produce from one tiny seed much fruit, many ears of wheat. Jesus knew that for the full power of God to be revealed, for the extent of God's love for the world to be made known he had to suffer and die and rise again. He also knew that through that there would be freedom for all people, a chance of a right relationship with God and a chance for us all to dwell in eternity and in perfect heavenly freedom.

The disciples and the Greeks in our reading today could see and touch and hear Jesus in person. We also read that they heard the voice of God from the clouds confirming that what Jesus was to endure was for the glory of God. We don't have that same privilege do we of being able to sit down on the grass or by the side of the lake and listen to Jesus teach and preach. We can't ask to see Jesus in physical form so how do we meet with Jesus? How do we have a personal relationship with God through Jesus which encourages and sustains us, challenges us, and changes us?

The past four weeks of Lent have been an opportunity to clear away some of the barriers that get in the way of our relationship with God. It might be that you have tried to clear time in your day or week to spend in prayer or reading the Bible or in fasting or in giving to charitable causes. It might be like many of us that you set off with good intentions on Ash Wednesday and things have been a bit tricky since. These last 2 weeks of Lent including Holy Week starting with Palm Sunday next Sunday are the perfect time to renew that commitment to clear the decks, to make time to spend with God so that you can spiritually meet with Jesus. A chance to focus on ways to put Jesus back into the centre of your life not squeezed to the margins by the demands of a busy and distracting world. Making that time, giving yourself that space to meet with God can and will be transforming. It might be in ways that you can predict, or it might be in ways that totally take you by surprise, but you will be changed and transformed by spending time with God. It might not be a dramatic or even a particularly noticeable change to those around you but spending time with God can be a very personal, gradual transformation as you allow God to mould you and guide you to the person you should be and lead you to the places and people where you are needed or belong, or both.

How you choose to meet with Jesus will be very individual. You might be someone who loves stillness and silence, you might be someone who needs music to help you connect with God. You might be someone who needs to move and walk and be outside to connect with God more easily. Perhaps you are a writer or an artist and creating something is the way you can focus on God, perhaps you need to study and read, perhaps you need to discuss ideas or maybe you need to be engaged in a fairly mundane task (a large pile of ironing or cutting the lawn or weeding the flower beds helps me) in order for my hands to be busy so that my mind can be freed up to focus on God. Whatever it is make a bit of time in the next couple of weeks to allow yourself to meet with God. Allow yourself to meet with this God who loves you so much he gave his Son to suffer and die before rising again that you might live life in all its fullness and with perfect freedom.

‘We wish to see Jesus.’ May God reveal something of his glory to you and may you catch a glimpse of the you who God sees – someone known and loved and cherished. ‘Father, glorify your name.’

Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

I wonder what Jesus looked like? Tall? Short? What colour hair? What colour eyes? Did he look friendly? What did he wear? What did he eat? Did he get cross or sad? Did he ever feel lonely?

I wonder what you would say to Jesus if you could sit down on the grass with him? Would you ask questions? Ask for a parable? Ask for an explanation of something? Ask what his favourite thing to do is?

What do you think Jesus might say to you?

Suggested intercessions

Lord God, for the Church throughout the world we pray. For places where your church is flourishing, we thank you. For places where your church is struggling, we pray for your spirit to come with hope and with renewed energy. We pray for the church in this place, for this community and its needs.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Lord God for the nations of the world we pray. For all the people of the world and for those who lead them, we pray for wisdom in leadership and decisions that prosper all people. For those parts of the world where there is war or conflict or injustice or suffering, we pray for your perfect peace.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Lord God for those who are sick in body mind or spirit we pray. We remember all those known to us who need our prayers and we pray for those who feel that they have no one to pray for them. We pray for all those involved in caring roles paid or unpaid and we pray for patience and kindness as they deal with those who are vulnerable.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Lord God for those who grieve we pray. We pray for your comfort for those who struggle to cope with grief, for those who are newly bereaved and for those who have anniversaries for loved ones at this time. We pray that those who have gone before us now dwell with you in glory and that we will one day be reunited in your love.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Lord God, in a moment of quiet we pray for ourselves. We pray for those things which are on our hearts and minds today and we offer them to you. (*Silence*). Lord as we seek to see you and to meet with you, we pray that we will recognise your glory in our midst.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Suggested hymns/songs

Lead us heavenly father lead us

To God be the glory

From heaven you came helpless babe

O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end

Take my life and let it be

Immortal Invisible, God only wise

Glorious things of thee are spoken

Lord, for the years

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)