

Sunday 30th August 2020

Call to worship

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, you have brought us to the beginning of a new week. Your hand is upon us to care for and protect us. We offer you our lives and hearts. May we always do your will and love our neighbour as ourselves. Amen

Confession

Holy God, giver of life and grace, we have sinned against you and against our brothers and sisters, through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We have belittled your love and betrayed your trust. We are sorry and ashamed; we repent of all our sins. In the name of Jesus Christ, please forgive us and lead us out from darkness to walk as children of light.

(Silence)

Assurance of Pardon

The almighty and merciful Lord forgives you from all your sins.

In gratitude we say:

God of love, give us a heart to love you and to love one another; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour.

Amen

New Testament Reading:

The Gospel of Matthew 16:21-28

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’ ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷ ‘For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’

This is the word of the Lord

Reflection

Peter just realised that Jesus is the Son of God and Jesus commended him for that. Now, when Jesus reveals His plan of salvation for all people, Peter interferes and, in good faith, tries to protect his Teacher from harm. But he gets an unexpected reaction from Jesus. Jesus calls him Satan! Wow! What has he done?

The problem lies with the fact that sometimes we try to get God to follow us, when we convince ourselves that God wants what we want. It happens to the best of us – only in the previous verses, Peter was appointed as the rock upon which the church of Christ was built, and now, within the same chapter, Jesus condemns Peter’s intentions.

The problem with Peter was that he thought that he understood Jesus. He had an understanding of the Messiah that derived from a mix of sources: Scripture, popular culture, synagogue teaching and maybe others. But when we try to make the word of

God fit within our worldview, then we get it wrong. Our understanding is human and limited in comparison to God. Therefore, if we deceive ourselves thinking that God and His plans are containable in our understanding, predictable and limited like our nature, then we do not know God and we are not following Him. We are trying to tell God to follow us, because we seem to believe that we know better than God.

Jesus talks about following Him. To follow Jesus, it requires obedience and discipline. Because sometimes we cannot understand what the plans are, or what God is thinking; we must rely on what the word of God tells us and pray that we get it right. Following Jesus requires to be attentive all the time, ready to change our course of action when we see that we are heading for disaster. It's just like driving, if God gives us the road to follow, we need to keep our eyes on the road. If we get distracted, we could end up crashing the car with very costly or even deadly consequences.

Jesus calls us to follow Him but He is not asking us to be blind. He wants us to obey Him but in an obedience that is not derived from blind faith but from total knowledge and awareness of the fact that He loves us and wants the best for us. Therefore, this becomes for us a joyful and trusting obedience because we know that whatever happens we are safe in His hands, even when we face death. Indeed, He defeated death and gave us the gift of eternal life.

There is also one more thing that we need to keep in mind. When Jesus puts us before the choice of following Him, He never talks about some understanding and some not understanding Him. He knows that everyone has been given the gift of understanding love. Even those with the least of understanding would recognise an act of kindness and love when they see it. Therefore, it is not a matter of understanding or not what Jesus teaches; but a matter of accepting or rejecting Jesus.

And if we are prepared to accept Him, we must follow Him and not expect Jesus to follow us. And to follow Jesus we must be ready to trust God with all that we have, even our lives and the lives of those we love. Only when we let go of all those things that stand between us and Jesus, that we find true life. Life with Jesus in the centre...and all those other things will be added on to you.

Amen

Hymn: Hymn: Click [here](#) for a link to the hymn “Faithful One”

Prayer of Intercession:

Heavenly Father, be with us in every experience of life. When we neglect you, remind us of your presence; when we are frightened, give us courage; when we are tempted, give us power to resist; when we are anxious and worried, give us peace; when we are weary in service, give us energy and zeal.

We pray for your Church in this place and throughout the world that, through the courage and faith of your people, your word may be preached and lived.

We pray for all the nations of the world that, following the ways of truth and justice, they may be free from bitterness and strife, and by the power of your love, live in peace.

We pray for those who are in trouble, that those who are sick may be cared for, that those who are lonely may be sustained and those who are oppressed may be strengthened, that those who mourn may be comforted and that those who are close to death may know their risen Lord.

Amen

The Lord's prayer

At the Saviour's command and formed by His divine teaching we pray together:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

Benediction:

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you always. Amen

Rev. Bruno Boldrini