



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

Wednesday of Holy Week

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

Andrew

We are offering a meditation each day for this very strange and exceptional Holy Week. We continue considering some of the events in the accounts of the Last Supper. After predicting the actions of Peter and Judas, we now look at the conversation which immediately follows with the disciple Thomas.

A Prayer for this Holy Week

Jesus, our brother,
you followed the necessary path
and were broken on our behalf.

May we neither cling to our pain where it is futile,
nor refuse to embrace the cost when it is required of us:
that in losing our selves for you sake,
we may be brought to new life,

Christ our victim,
whose beauty was disfigured and whose body was torn upon the cross;
open wide your arms to embrace a suffering world,
that we may not turn away our hearts,
but abandon ourselves to your mercy
through Jesus Christ,
the passion of God.

Amen.

Gospel Reading – John 14 v1-7

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God still, and trust also in me.

There are many rooms in my Father’s house;

if there were not, I should have told you.

I am going now to prepare a place for you.

And after I have gone and prepared a place for you,

I shall return and take you with me,

so that where I am, you may be too.

You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas, one of the disciples said,

“Lord, we do not know where you are going,

so how can we know the way ?”

Jesus replied, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

No one can come to the father except through me.

If you know me, you know my Father too.

From this moment you know Him and have seen Him.”

Meditation

Those of you who have been to a funeral I have been conducting will recognise this reading as the “default setting”. It was also part of the gospel that we used for meditation at the last Taize service we had at St John’s just before public worship ceased.

We are in a situation when we are hearing daily of many deaths. Deaths of people of all ages and backgrounds who are dying with this plague, many without loved ones present, at best their hand held by a caring stranger as they pass from this world to the next. Even as recently as a few weeks ago it felt very far away and unreal, now it is coming home to us as we see and hear news, as we know of people who have relatives who have died, or have people who are in the caring front line in London or more locally.

This has already been my second busiest year for funerals in 30 years of ministry, and I have yet to do one for someone who died with this virus. I have lost people who have been close to me over the years. I have thought, rarely, of my own death or the consequences of the possible deaths of those very closest to me. But the situation feels so much more real than ever; for myself, for relatives both older and younger, so I am thinking about it now, and maybe you are too. Like most people I hope that death occurs in homes, surrounded by love ones, with some chance of preparation and sharing, without too much pain, and strengthened by the rites of the church. I now have to face that none of these may be quite likely.

Before yesterday’s gospel, Peter has just been told he cannot follow Jesus, at least not yet. Jesus, we have been told, is troubled in spirit. Following immediately on, in today’s gospel, Jesus then asks the disciples then (and us now) not to be troubled, but to trust in him because there is more than enough space for us all, and that it will be prepared by Jesus himself for us. Just as the host acted as the servant in washing feet, so Jesus will be the host and the housekeeping service who has prepared our rooms ready for us in his Father’s home. More than that he will be our escort, our taxi service, so we arrive in good state at the correct destination.

Thomas does not understand, just as he will not accept the resurrection until he can see and touch for himself. Thomas does not know where Jesus is going, so he cannot accept that Jesus himself is the compelling taxi service to the Father, that Jesus is the Way. In this plague situation where things have been brought to a head, we will probably be echoing Thomas question; Where? How?

I know I am.

If I get symptoms, what will I say to who? If I get worse and have to go to hospital, will I expect to return home? What might I say as the paramedics carry me away? Do I leave my wedding ring and crucifix at home so they are not lost if the worst happens, or do I need them with me? What do I need to say to others who I do not live with but mean so much to me? How do I make sure they find anything I want them to have or know? What sort of funeral do I want in these limited circumstances? Burial or cremation? And Thomas's questions too; more How? than Where?

Jesus adds in his reply to Thomas, I am the Way, and also the Truth, and adds still more, the Life.

Some translations of John chapter 14 talk of believing rather than trusting; the Greek word means either, or rather both. Believing can be a head/mind word. For some it is not more believing certain things about Jesus, like those we recite in the creed, or even the simple cry of Thomas when he does see and touch the risen Christ "My Lord and my God!" We use the expression "believing in someone", when we are expressing confidence in them now for the future, perhaps when we are investing in them and expressing confidence in them "coming good" or "making it". Trusting is a heart word, an emotional or relationship word. We trust for some gut instinct, not necessarily demanding evidence or a track record. We trust when we know someone will catch us when we fall, always be there for us, or when we can rely on them.

Jesus adds to being "the Way", that he is "the Truth". That which we may believe in for the future; that which we may trust in, or throw ourselves into his arms, knowing he will catch us and hold us in a loving embrace. Jesus adds the third term, "the Life", which points us back to the Father's house with so many prepared places for us, and with Jesus as escort. And in the verse which is the climax (sometimes omitted at funerals even by the institutional church who cannot stomach Jesus's limitless generosity) - "From this moment you know Him and have seen Him."

Now and here, your ticket is booked to be redeemed when you need it. *"From this moment you know Him and have seen Him."* Last Sunday I talked of Matthew's last word of Jesus, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* On Good Friday we will have John's *"It is accomplished"*. Today we will have Luke's *"Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit"*, a quotation from verse 5 of Psalm 31, but the whole psalm is worthy of reading/praying. For although I share Thomas's question to Jesus, I can believe and trust that when the time of trial, maybe times of trial come, I can take these words of Jesus to truly be my own, *"Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit"* and I pray that you all may too.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

God bless, Andrew

PSALM 31

(I think ♦ indicates where you may choose to pause mid verse)

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; ♦
deliver me in your righteousness. Incline your ear to me; ♦
make haste to deliver me. Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold; ♦
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake. Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me, ♦
for you are my strength. Into your hands I commend my spirit, ♦
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

I hate those who cling to worthless idols; ♦
I put my trust in the Lord. I will be glad and rejoice in your mercy, ♦
for you have seen my affliction and known my soul in adversity.

You have not shut me up in the hand of the enemy; ♦
you have set my feet in an open place. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am in trouble; ♦
my eye is consumed with sorrow, my soul and my body also.

For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing; ♦
my strength fails me because of my affliction, and my bones are consumed.

I have become a reproach to all my enemies and even to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances; ♦
when they see me in the street they flee from me.

I am forgotten like one that is dead, out of mind; ♦
I have become like a broken vessel. For I have heard the whispering of the crowd;
fear is on every side; ♦
they scheme together against me, and plot to take my life. But my trust is in you, O Lord. ♦
I have said, 'You are my God. 'My times are in your hand; ♦
deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.

'Make your face to shine upon your servant, ♦
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

Lord, let me not be confounded for I have called upon you; ♦
but let the wicked be put to shame; let them be silent in the grave.

Let the lying lips be put to silence ♦
that speak against the righteous with arrogance, disdain and contempt.

How abundant is your goodness, O Lord, which you have laid up for those who fear you; ♦
which you have prepared in the sight of all for those who put their trust in you.

You hide them in the shelter of your presence from those who slander them; ♦
you keep them safe in your refuge from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the Lord! ♦
For he has shown me his steadfast love when I was as a city besieged.

I had said in my alarm, 'I have been cut off from the sight of your eyes.' ♦
Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my prayer when I cried out to you.

Love the Lord, all you his servants; ♦
for the Lord protects the faithful, but repays to the full the proud.

Be strong and let your heart take courage, ♦
all you who wait in hope for the Lord.