



March Team Ministry

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

Welcome

3rd Sunday after Trinity ~ June 27th 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

I am continuing to enjoy the services on TV and radio and also from St Albans, Ely & Leicester Cathedrals, and you may have found others.

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

Prayers for this Week

Fearful God, you require of our love appalling sacrifice; and your lasting promise is contained in contradiction. May we so lay on your altar our dearest desires that we may receive them back from you as unaccountable gift, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

God our Saviour, you have broken the tyranny of sin and have sent the Spirit into our hearts; give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service that we and all creation may be brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God. Look on this world in pity and in power; hold us fast to your promise of peace won for us by your Son, our Saviour Jesus.

Amen.

Reading: Genesis 22 v1-14

God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'

Meditation

We continue with the story of Isaac, and although it may be a familiar story, it should not have lost its power to shock. For here it seems that a father is being asked by God to sacrifice his son. It seems primitive; it seems cruel; it seems unfair; it seems unnecessary and incomprehensible. And it also has some connections and echoes with Jesus's death on a cross.

We have all been asked to make sacrifices over the last months in this unexpected and unprecedented situation. We have been asked to give up our liberty in order not to spread the virus. We have been asked to isolate; many have been laid off work or asked to work in very different ways. We have been asked to protect our closest relatives by not seeing them, we have been asked to keep our distance and forbear from cuddling and contact. We have been asked to go out as little as possible. We have forgone holidays and parties, and so much more. It has been a sacrifice; a real sacrifice that has cost us, reduced our quality of life and we have missed out significantly. Some have been unable to visit those who are ill, and even those at the end of their lives, and even have been unable to attend funerals. There have been no weddings or celebrations. We are probably feeling at times disappointed, jaded, threatened, bored, stressed, as well as at sometimes resigned, stoic, firm, determined and resolved. – Don't be afraid or reluctant to admit to ourselves and others how much we have been disrupted and disorientated. And we are not going to be back to where we were, or where we want to be, for some time yet and it may well be very different. The sacrifice is real, but I believe, necessary.

The request to Abraham seems bizarre and inexplicable. For any father to consider, let alone start to prepare, the practical steps of the sacrifice of their own child cannot be accepted. Does God change his mind when he provides the ram in the nick of time? or was it some sort of extreme challenge to Abraham? What damage does it do to Isaac's trust in his father or in God? In today's world we would call in the police, set the whole safeguarding procedures in motion, and shout of child abuse at the merest whiff of this story. Should we be that horrified? Is it useful to apply 21st century values to ways of thinking that are thousands of years old? Can the happy ending explain it all away; and we just be glad that the end result is saying that human life is valuable and never to be sacrificed, for God's promise of the future is upheld not destroyed?

All these are good, allowed and pertinent questions that the church and Christians cannot evade. Part of the answer is that it belongs to a different world with different assumptions, and we should not be quick to judge other eras by today's world. For if we believe in a living God who sends his Spirit amongst us we are always open to new insights. And amongst all the horror and scandal of the threatened death of Isaac, we must not lose sight that God's promises for a future are kept, that God does provide the sacrifice, and maybe even not to jump to the conclusion that we can always understand, let alone dictate, the ways of God. And Abraham's trust was rewarded.

There is too the Christian connection with Jesus and the cross which is to be made. Here no substitute is provided; God the Son is sacrificed; he is the Lamb of God – there is no other. Yet there is, not so much a happy ending, but certainly one which ends with a new future and life that is to come, and come abundantly. God’s involvement is even more intense and personal than in the Old Testament parallel.

Historically the church has used sacrificial language to explain the reason and need for Jesus’s death; maybe that will no longer strike the necessary echo for people today. Historically, other language has been used too, religious language of sin, slavery language of redemption, chivalrous medieval language of honour and satisfaction, judicial language of judgement, 20th century language of victory and progress. Perhaps in order to remind people of the significance of Jesus and God’s ways we will have to find new language.

So, may I suggest that we do connect to our virus and lockdown experiences. We have been asked to put the common good before our own agendas. We have been asked to put the most vulnerable as a priority. We have been asked to question the way we use the earth’s resources and pollute our environment. We have been asked to address afresh and act anew over racism, nationalism and tribalism. We have been asked to face the reality of death more vividly. We have been asked to reflect on what really is important in life, and what gives true well-being. And I am sure you will have found different or more issues.

And what of the contribution of the Abraham and Isaac narrative and the Son of God dying on the cross? God does not avoid or evade pain and suffering, but embraces and transforms. God does not separate himself from his creation, especially humanity, all humanity, made in his image, but identifies and is in solidarity with us all. God will do whatever it takes to give a true future, but we may be surprised and caught off guard by it. God invites us to proclaim afresh in each generation, and in language. ideas and images that belongs to today, his love, his gift of himself, and his eternal future. God did not withhold his Son, so we have him, and much more wonderfully he has us all.

“Father it is humbling thing to be died for. Let me remember that Jesus, your Son did exactly that for me. And he went to his death knowing full well how often I would forget his love. Let no pride keep from kneeling at the foot of the cross of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, my Saviour I pray. Amen.” (A prayer of Peter Marshall former Dean of Worcester who died this week)

God bless, Andrew

Prayer

Encouraged by our fellowship with all the saints, let us make our prayers through our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, your Son called men and women to leave the past behind them and to follow him as his disciples in the way of the cross. Look with mercy upon those whom he calls today, marks with the cross and makes disciples within his church...

Your Son told his disciples not to be afraid and at Easter breathed on them his gift of peace. Look with mercy upon the world into which he sent them out and give it that peace for which it longs...

Your Son formed around him a company who were no longer servants but friends, and invited all to be his brother and sister and mother. Look with mercy upon our families and our friends and upon the communities in which we share...

Your Son sent out disciples to heal the sick. Look with mercy on those who yearn to hear the good news of salvation, and renew among your people the gifts of compassion and care...

Your Son promised to those who followed him that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and would share the banquet of his kingdom. According to your promise, look with mercy on those who walked with Christ in this life and have now passed through death...

Almighty God, at this time when we recall Saints Peter and Paul, you have built your Church upon the foundation of apostles, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone: that in unity and peace we may proclaim one truth and follow one Lord, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever

Amen.