



# **March Team Ministry**

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

*Welcome*

**12th Sunday after Trinity ~ August 30th 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](mailto:andrew.marchurch@gmail.com)

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

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**We are resuming some of our Church services with socially distancing, and will maintain, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries; we want people to have a genuine choice.**

**St Peter's: Sundays 8am & 11am ~ Wednesdays 10am**

**St Mary's: Sundays 9.15am**

**St John's: Sundays 9:30am ~ Tuesdays 10am**

**Please Note:**

**Except for medical reasons (and those under 11) we are now required to wear a face mask in our church buildings.**

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**Prayers for this Week**

O God, whose word burns like a fire within us, grant us a bold and faithful spirit, that in your strength we may be unafraid to speak your word and follow where you lead. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Passionate Lord, walking to Golgotha in the midst of our confusion: free us from our images of you which keep you enthroned in idle power, apart from the pain and sin of the world; lead us to embrace the scandal of the cross and let our violence die that greater life may rise; through Jesus Christ, who took the form of a slave.

**Amen.**

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## Reading: Matthew 16 v21-28

*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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' 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.'*

*Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 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?'*

*'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. 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.'*

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### Meditation

This week's reading very much follows on from last's week, indeed it is really a continuation of the same scene. Simon Peter has given a good answer to Jesus' question, 'Who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter has answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' and been told, 'you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' But, before we know where we are Peter has fallen from the top of the class to bottom, from teacher's pet to the dunce's corner! Jesus says to him, 'You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

The turning point seems to be when Jesus spells out that his pilgrimage to Jerusalem will not be for him to be proclaimed as Messiah, or worshipped as King, but to suffer, die and rise again. God's ways are the ways which embrace suffering and death (and transform them!). The way to follow Jesus is to take up your own cross. The way to find true life, Jesus says, is to risk losing it. The way to be who you are, and to be prepared to lay one's own agenda and assumptions aside. It all sounds very counter intuitive, if not foolish. It sounds at first sight to be saying that heavenly ways are totally different from earthly common sense and instinct.

Peter is told that what he defines on earth will become the heavenly way. Then he is corrected for focussing on earthly not heavenly things. Peter appears to be horrified at the struggles and strife Jesus will encounter. So perhaps this challenging invitation to take up your own cross is a step too far for him, and he cannot grasp it until Jesus has completed that road to calvary, which is also the road to the empty tomb.

There are a lot of negative words here; deny, lose, forfeit; and seemingly a lot of costly challenges; taking up a cross, losing in order to find, forfeiting in order to gain, denying in order to follow.

Now, one way to turn this into a positive narrative, is to say that all is transformed in the light of Christ. We deny false images of our self. We give up meaningless lives to find meaning. We find our true selves rather than accepting the expectations and projections of others and society. We find true meaning for lives rather than accept the rat race of our society. We discard the transient in order to find the eternal. We lose fear of death, and become prepared to accept death as an inevitable part of human life. And, this is all very good, and is, in part, what Jesus means; you can only understand the cross in the light of the resurrection. You can only risk losing your life, in the knowledge that there are other different ways to live; you can only appreciate life by finding it for yourself. As we say sometimes in our liturgy "And now we give you thanks because for our salvation he was obedient even to death on a cross. The tree of shame was made the tree of glory; and where life was lost, there life has been restored."

But, certainly, this approach is open to challenge. Am I just making the uncomfortable comfortable by redefining terms? Am I just finding ways of walking away from the challenges of loss? Am I missing the point that Jesus, as Matthew records it is, making?

Our gospel today ends with Jesus saying that the Son of Man will sort everything out, balance the books, and even bring in his Kingdom fully into place in the lifetime of those standing there.

For Peter the situation is challenging, and, yes, confusing and maybe disorientating. So, we should not despair at our own grasping at understanding and struggle to find the appropriate response, for we are part of the church that is built on that rock. Let us not deny the challenge that following Jesus requires. Let us not deny the weight of the cross we are asked to bear. Let us not tame the gospel. But let us not be overwhelmed or paralysed by this task, for Christ has gone before us, he is Risen, and the Kingdom has come. Remember, if you have a long journey, you still start with one simple step. If you have a meal to eat, you start with one bite. If you have a life to live, keep taking a deep breath.

So, I want to end with a story for you to read, re-read and think on. It came to me via a book written by an Indian Jesuit, Anthony de Mello. His book "The Song of the Bird" meant a lot to me in my formative years, and still does.

*"A man walking through a forest saw a fox that had lost its legs and wondered how it survived. Then he saw a tiger come in with game in its mouth. The tiger had its fill and left the rest of the meat for the fox.*

*The next day God fed the fox by the means of the same tiger. The man began to wonder at God's great goodness and said to himself, "I, too, shall just rest in a corner with full trust in the Lord and he will provide for me with all I need." He did this for many days, but nothing happened and the poor fellow was almost at death's door when he heard a Voice say, "O you who are in the path of error, open your eyes to the Truth! Follow the example of the tiger and stop imitating the disabled fox."*

*On a street I saw a small girl cold and shivering in a thin dress, with little hope of a decent meal. I became angry and said to God, "Why do you permit this? Why don't you do something about it?"*

*For a while God said nothing. That night he replied quite suddenly, "I certainly did something about it. I made you."*

**God bless, Andrew**

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## **Prayers**

Take up thy cross, the Saviour said,  
if thou wouldst my disciple be;  
deny thyself, the world forsake,  
and humbly follow after me.

Take up thy cross, let not its weight  
fill thy weak spirit with alarm;  
his strength shall bear thy spirit up,  
and brace thy heart and nerve thine arm.

Take up thy cross, nor heed the shame,  
nor let thy foolish pride rebel;  
thy Lord for thee the cross endured,  
to save thy soul from death and hell.

Take up thy cross then in his strength,  
and calmly sin's wild deluge brave,  
'twill guide thee to a better home,  
it points to glory o'er the grave.

Take up thy cross and follow Christ,  
nor think till death to lay it down;  
for only those who bear the cross  
may hope to wear the glorious crown.

To thee, great Lord, the One in Three,  
all praise forevermore ascend:  
O grant us in our home to see  
the heavenly life that knows no end.