



March Team Ministry

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

Welcome

16th Sunday after Trinity ~ 19th September 2021

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

We are keeping services much the same; staying away if ill, wearing masks, washing hands and respecting distance. We have congregational singing for those wearing masks. We continue to keep people safe and to feel safe.

~ Services with Social Distancing ~

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

St Wendreda's Sundays 11am

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

Prayers

God, who draws near, who comes to our level, whose nature is revealed in lordship laid aside: give us grace to welcome you in the one who tests the bounds of our community: in the child, in the outcast, the one who comes with no power save that of remaking our heart; through Jesus Christ, the one who will be betrayed.

Amen

O God, protector of the poor and defender of the just, in your kingdom the last become first, the gentle are strong, and the lowly exalted. Give us wisdom from above, that we may find in your servant Jesus the pattern of true discipleship and the grace to persevere in following him, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Mark 9 v30-50

(This and next week's Gospel readings belong together)

After leaving the mountain Jesus and his disciples went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of

all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.'

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. 'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

Meditation

Jesus and his followers travel through Galilee in the direction of Jerusalem. They avoid the main roads and the villages; now teaching the disciples has priority. It won't be long now before they are on their own. Do they see the seriousness of the situation? Jesus said to them 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' Hasn't Jesus already said that to them?

Yes, but that he seems to have chosen to go the way of suffering is so strange and incomprehensible to the disciples that it has to be said more than once. Perhaps now it will get through to them? That's a vain hope. Again they cannot grasp the meaning. They prefer to get round to another question: which among them is the greatest? The greatest in what? The boldest, the richest, the most powerful, the most pious? Perhaps a little bit of everything.

'What were you arguing about on the way?' Jesus asks them when they arrive in Capernaum. The disciples are silent. Do they feel trapped? Jesus knows all too well what they were discussing with one another on the way. He's going to Jerusalem, and they're talking about who is the first. That's the last thing they need to bother about along the way. Jesus went to sit down and said to them: 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' All twelve have to be told that the kingdom of God isn't about power but about service. God is different.

God is different. With him the last become first. God is served by serving the least. 'Jesus took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...' You must receive such a child in my name. Not for yourself, not to boss it around or to relieve your loneliness. Solely in my name.

Now one might expect a long silence in the house, to allow this thought to sink in. But John thinks it advisable to change the subject. 'Talking about in my name,' he says, 'we saw someone who isn't one of us busy casting out evil spirits in your name. We quickly intervened, because he isn't one of us.'

Ironic! Contradictory! The disciples are pretty average when it comes to driving out demons, but they obstruct someone who is doing this because he isn't one of us! Clearly John expects to earn Jesus' praise for this. 'Do not stop him;' says Jesus, 'for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. And so that the disciples don't think in a narrow-minded way when they have to take over from Jesus, Mark adds another saying of Jesus 'whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.' We can find something of God in people who indiscriminately help those who have no helper.

Mark has another saying of Jesus about children which deserves to be listened to, about whoever causes little ones who believe to fall would do better to drown themselves. It may be that this is as much about grown-ups who are defenceless when persecuted for faith, as about children. Mark knows those benevolent outsiders who offer a persecuted Christian a cup of water, and the malicious bystanders who set out to make the followers of Jesus stumble. However, the temptations can just as easily come from within. What's to be done then? 'If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.' Similarly, for feet and eyes.

To many people, these sayings suggest primarily sexual transgressions, but on the way to the kingdom there are many kinds of temptation, certainly in times of persecution. Mark impresses on his fellow believers that they must be strong at all times. In order to remain on course it can sometimes be necessary to cut into one's own flesh. For Mark, that's the way of the kingdom. It's the way Jesus also went. This way ends up with God.

According to Mark, on the other side of death, a person can either land in heaven or hell. He doesn't dwell further on the matter, but that doesn't prevent us from exploring a bit. Let us suppose that we know nothing, either about a heaven or about a hell. But we may brood on the matter. We dream of heaven. Is that wishful thinking? That goes without saying. We don't want to believe that with death it is all over. Beyond doubt the wish is father to the thought. But isn't that the point. The question is whether we may believe that we have a Father who has the same wish in his thoughts. There comes an end to the love and care that one human can devote to another: death intervenes. Does it also intervene with God? That's hardly credible.

Then is there also such a thing as hell? We also fantasize over that, and of course that fantasy isn't all that crazy. The God who gave us life also wants to ask us what we have done with it. No, we still don't know, but it's hard to imagine that God is indifferent to the way in which we use our talents. So it isn't so strange a notion that there is some reward in heaven for those who fed the hungry and clothed the naked and stood up for the child. Should the villain also get what he deserves, or does he have an advantage over his victim not only in time but also in eternity? Is it a purely human desire for vengeance – however understandable – that makes us sketch out a hell? If we are responsible people – and we all want to be that; who wants to be said to be of diminished responsibility? – then God does a person justice once he holds them responsible. That's a terrifying way but also a mature thought.

So the images of heaven and hell introduce some tension into life here in earth. This can be a healthy tension; it can also be a pernicious tension. There is belief which makes people sick and belief which heals them. The thought of it can maim a person; it can also form a person. Someone once asked Pope John XXIII: 'does hell exist?' 'Certainly,' said the pope in reply. 'But there's no one in it.' He isn't playing around with tradition; he thinks that hell is a valuable fantasy of faith. But hell is empty. That happens with a God who loves people. So don't be afraid. And don't be vengeful either.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers ~ The Litany

Minister: God the Father;

All: have mercy on us.

Minister: God the Son;

All: have mercy on us.

Minister: God the Holy Spirit;

All: have mercy on us.

Minister: Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity

All: have mercy on us.

Minister: From all evil and mischief; from pride, vanity, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred and malice; and from all evil intent,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: From sloth, worldliness and love of money; from hardness of heart and contempt for your word and your laws,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: From sins of body and mind; from deceits of the world, the flesh, and evil,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: In all times of sorrow; in all times of joy; in the hour of our death, and at the day of judgement,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: By the mystery of your holy incarnation; by your birth, childhood and obedience; by your baptism, fasting, and temptation,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: By your ministry in word and work; by your mighty acts of power; and by your preaching of your kingdom,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: By your agony and trial; by your cross and passion; and by your precious death and burial,

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: By your mighty resurrection; by your glorious ascension; and by your sending of the Holy Spirit

All: good Lord, deliver us.

Minister: Hear our prayers, O Lord our God,

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Govern and direct your holy Church; fill it with love and truth; and grant it that unity which is your will.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Give us boldness to preach the gospel in all the world, and make disciples of all the nations.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Enlighten Stephen and Dagmar, our Bishops, and all who minister, with knowledge and understanding, that by their teaching and their lives they may proclaim your word.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Give your people grace to hear and receive your word, and to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Bring into the way of truth all who have erred and are deceived.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Strengthen those who stand: comfort and help the faint hearted; raise up the fallen; and finally beat down evil under our feet.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Guide the leaders of the nations into the ways of peace and justice.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Guard and strengthen your servant Elizabeth our Queen, that she may put her trust in you, and seek your honour and glory.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Endue the High Court of Parliament and all ministers of the Crown with wisdom and understanding.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Bless those who administer the law, that they may uphold justice, honesty and truth.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Give us the will to use the resources of the earth to your glory, and for the good of all creation.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Bless and keep all your people.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Bring your joy into all families; strengthen and deliver those in childbirth, watch over our children and guide the young, bring reconciliation to those in discord and peace to those in stress.

All: Hear us good Lord.

Minister: Help and comfort the lonely, the bereaved and the oppressed.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Keep in safety those who travel and all who are in danger.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Heal the sick in body and mind, and provide for the homeless, the hungry and the destitute.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Show your pity on prisoners and refugees, and all who are in trouble.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Forgive our enemies, our persecutors and slanderers, and forgive their hearts.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Hear us as we remember those who have died in the peace of Christ both those who have confessed the faith and those whose faith is known to you alone and grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

All: Lord have mercy.

Minister: Give us true repentance: forgive us our sins of negligence and ignorance and our deliberate sins: and grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit to amend our lives according to your holy word.

All: Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.