



March Team Ministry

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

Welcome

16th Sunday after Trinity - 2nd October 2022

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 572117 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

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We are still asking people to be sensible and sensitive . Mask wearing is optional. Respect people's space. Washing hands is a good idea. Wine offered (for those wishing it). Dipping is not recommended.

~ 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

Evensong at St John's this Sunday (2nd) - 6:30pm

Prayer, Collect, for this week

God our Saviour, you call us into your service. Make us wise and resourceful: children of the light who continue your work in this world with untiring concern for integrity and justice. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, and for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Lord of the growing seed, you reach to the roots of our being and quench our sea-deep thirst: help us to know ourselves through the eyes of the other who calls us to answer and serve and, in the end, be filled; through Jesus Christ, the Master of the Table. Amen.

Gospel of Luke 17 v5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' The Lord replied, 'If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you.

'Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table"? Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink"? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!" '

Meditation

‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea”, and it would obey you.’

Is the implication derived from this translation that the disciples do not have faith, but that even if they had a little bit it would work wonders? Or is the better understanding (which is more consistent with the Greek text), ‘If you have faith, and the assumption is that you do? That is since you have faith, even the minutest amount, the impossible is possible. In the first the point is that if the apostles had the least bit of faith the impossible would be possible, in the second, and more correct, reading the point is that the apostles have at least some faith, which is enough to do the impossible. Remember their question was about an increase in faith, which again points to the fact they already have faith.

Faith, belief, or perhaps better, **TRUST**. (*pistis*, Greek; or *fides*, Latin)

Also this morning I read a review of a dense, expensive and scholarly book which makes the case very convincingly (I will never get round to buying or reading such a work) that the words usually translated from the original Greek as faith or belief in our English bibles usually signify TRUST. We need to change the emphasis in our teaching and life in the church with less emphasis on ‘belief’ and more on ‘trust’. One illustration is that *pistis* understood as trust, is a key feature of the gospel healing stories that is still crucial to the doctor-patient relationship.

Things go badly wrong when patients do not trust in their doctors, and when doctors do not trust patients. Another point made is that at the time of the New Testament, almost everyone believed in the existence of God, or gods, but was not sure (with good reason) that gods could be trusted. Today a growing portion of Western Societies no longer believe in any deity. Perhaps it is time to take the heat off religious belief and to debate, instead, what or whom we can ultimately trust. I am glad that at most funerals I choose the translation of John 14 which begins “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust also in me”; and ends with Jesus saying, “If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know Him and have seen Him.”

Now how does it feel to be told, *“We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!”*? Slavery has come to the fore in public debate and action. Whether the image of slavery that first comes into our mind is the cruel transatlantic slavery of black Africans working on plantations, or more modern forms of domestic nannies, workers picking our vegetables in the fens, sex slaves or hand car washes, to be compared to a slave, is insulting. I am glad that (as far as I know) none of our churches have memorials glorifying slave owners and causing offence, and hope that the money that built our churches was not derived from slave ownership or trade.

Jesus College in Cambridge was refused permission to move from Chapel to a museum such a memorial despite support of the Master, students and our Bishop, saying that the money the owner gave was made before he got into slavery and he had been misrepresented. Other statues have been toppled, explanations added, and the challenge is being addressed. And of course there is a greater challenge to be faced over paying compensation for slavery, And should this compensation be punitive or redemptive. Is it just or fair to punish or reward descendants? And we also have learnt the hard lesson that when reparations were imposed in Europe after 20th century wars they led to rebellion, revenge and yet more wars. There is a demand to rewrite history, not just to accept the version from the victors and privileged, but I also think it is very important not to make our tragic history invisible, nor to be trapped into siloes or by stereotypes.

In Luke’s parable we have a man of very modest means for he has but one slave. This slave therefore undertakes the work on his master’s field, be it ploughing or tending the stock, and the very same slave then has to cook the evening meal and serve at table. Only when he has met his master’s needs is he allowed to have his own meal. Jesus, in the parable, then confirms the expectations of his day; the master would not thank the slave for working outside all day, then cooking and serving in the evening, for the slave had just fulfilled his expected role. Slaves simply fulfil their tasks, they cannot expect thanks for doing so.

So this seems to be saying to the apostles who have asked for an increase of faith (trust), to get on with their task and not to expect to be rewarded for it. Of course, we may ask the question of, and wonder at what this task may be. The most obvious answer is to rewind to the verses immediately before the apostles ask the question. Two points have been made by Jesus just before.

1. Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, and it is a tragedy when people stumble. And anyone who causes others to stumble, especially the vulnerable, by setting them up or by pushing or tripping them, does the most terrible thing. Be wary!

2. If someone gets things wrong, you must deal with it. And if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent", you must forgive.'

So we are asked to care for and raise up the small, weak and vulnerable, and to be vigilant to hurt and harm whilst being endlessly forgiving, and to do this not for reward, but because it is simply our task as followers of Jesus. And, even if we think we are not good enough, that really is to trust and be trusted.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

Blessed are you poor, **for yours is the kingdom of God.**

Blessed are you that hunger now, **for you shall be satisfied.**

Blessed are you that weep now, **for you shall laugh.**

Blessed are you when others hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man,
rejoice in that day, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

But woe to you that are rich, **for you have received your consolation.**

Woe to you that are full now, **for you shall hunger.**

Woe to you that laugh now, **for you shall mourn and weep.**

Woe to you, when all people speak well of you,

for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

But Jesus says to you, hear,

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

bless those who curse you, **pray for those who abuse you.**

God be gracious to us and bless us, and make your face shine upon us:

Lord, have mercy on us.

May your ways be known on the earth, your saving power among the nations:

Christ, have mercy on us.

You, Lord, have made known your salvation, and reveal your justice in the sight of the nations:

Spirit, have mercy on us.

Teach us, O Lord, the way of your statutes;

and lead us in the path of your commandments.

Keep our nation under your care; **and guide us in justice and truth.**

O Lord, deal graciously with your servants;

teach us discernment and knowledge.

Let not the needy be forgotten; **nor the hope of the poor be taken away.**

Guide the meek in judgement; **and teach your ways to the gentle.**

Lord, remember your people;

whom you have purchased and redeemed of old.