

Susan's homily for 28th June

Matthew 10 v. 40 onwards and Jeremiah 38: 5 – 9

Normally, I hold this up (*a cross*) toward the end of a talk. Today, here it is. We look to the cross for strength and to Jesus to support us and be alongside us in our faith life.

However, we live our faith life in the World, as Jesus and the apostles call it. The world is not just the physical earth in this context; it is the secular life around us which often has little to do with our faith. It is the pull of society with its demands and obligations. It is the people we meet. It is in fact every facet of the lives we lead.

I have quite a fear of heights, and know folk with vertigo that are worse than me. When I'm up high or on a long staircase in a stately home, with an open drop in the middle I am a sight to behold. I press back against the bank, rocks or wall. It feels like a physical pull to the edge. That sort of happens with the world. We may feel pulled to things that are bad for us, while living our faith lives. Trouble is, the drop is obvious, but the pull that may be caused by loved ones, or the world, may not be so clear.

The readings today speak to this dilemma. In the reading from Jeremiah, we find at the time of Zedekiah, King of Judah, there was a prophet, Jeremiah, but also Hananiah from Gibeon. He was the son of Azzur. Hananiah wanted to be popular, and to do that he told the people that God would fulfil all the desires of the people. He wants to help the anxious, stressed, people. A perfectly good feeling, and if it happened to lead to face for him, well so be it. Anyway, whoever said people have to be miserable? Whereas poor Jeremiah – what a doom-monger. How can he lay his guilt trips on the people?

Perhaps Hananiah really did believe he was speaking God's word into the situation, but he seems to be more interested in his listeners' fears and needs, and fulfilling them. This is how the world can intrude into the lives of people then, and ours as well. Jeremiah is very different. He looks to God for guidance. He would love to follow Hananiah's positive words on victory and peace, but he knows it won't happen. The woolly, positive, type of spirituality spoken out by Hananiah is challenged by Jeremiah. He shouts, "That's not what it's all about, this is how it actually is." He calls the people to have trust in God, and be at peace, however their life is.

The same kind of truth faces us strongly in the Matthew reading. We cannot pursue what is good for us on and off. When I went to the osteopath last Friday he said my left knee

wasn't stable any more. His next comment was "are you still doing those exercises I showed you?... it's good you carry on walking, but what about the exercise to strengthen the muscle above the knee to help?" Much to my embarrassment I had to say I had stopped doing them!! So, with that strong reminder, off I go with them again. This time not on and off. Well, hopefully. How often does that kind of thing happen in our lives? And how often in our faith lives, if we are really honest? Yet, every day, whether we achieve or not, in everything we do, however things are in our lives, God is with us. In our reading, Jesus is encouraging us and being positive. He talks of opportunities taken rather than missed. We can be really enmeshed in our lives in the everyday world, and sometimes that can make us miss chances. Recognising God is with us always is a stronger anchor for us in life than any pull into the world, and possible mistakes.

It doesn't have to be great big things that take us closer to God, and away from the pull of the world. "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward." If we do the small acts of kindness, in God's name, out of love for him, he will transform the smallest service into something lastingly beautiful. While we can, let us help all we can. We all have difficulties in life, but we cannot be promised, as Hananiah did, that all will be put right. What we can always do is travel alongside God as much as we can and look to him as our anchor through it all. While we are travelling, trying our best to hold on with all our might to that anchor looking after us. We may not feel up to challenging in a loud voice as Jeremiah did, but by our actions we will be known as his disciples.

(take a winter creature out of the bag). He also comes with a message to us. Look at him! He hasn't trusted God enough to not make preparations for his journey. He has skis on in case it snows, big boots, and warm clothes. Here he has strong nice legs to go on this trip. *(drop him to his feet)*. O dear, his legs have buckled. Something has happened! But look, he keeps looking to God as his anchor, so he carries on.

As S. Augustine says, Keep stepping forward, and if we can, sing as we go¹

¹ "sing up! And keep on walking" – S. Augustine of Hippo