

Monday 8th March 2021: Psalms 5 & 7; Jeremiah 11:1-17; John 7:37-52

'Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come from Galilee.'

Jesus has been in the temple speaking and clearly his message is getting through to many who are listening to him. Some of the people are saying 'surely this man is a prophet.' Others 'He is the Christ'.

And then there were those who were more concerned about geography ... 'How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived.'

Isn't that frustrating, you want to shout, do they not realise Jesus is from the line of David, and was born in Bethlehem!

Geography seems to be clouding the eyes of many to what Jesus is offering ... life giving water, streams of living water that will flow from within.

This teaching transports us to the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well, in chapter 4. The image of Jesus being the living water, being made all the clearer, as Jesus contrasts the gift he offers, with the water you can draw from a well. Drink from a well and you will get thirsty again, but the gift he offers, is living water, whoever drinks of it, will never thirst again ... it will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.



The Samaritan woman encounters Jesus and runs to tell all her townsfolk ... those by whom she had already been rejected ... about Jesus and many came to believe in him.

As Jesus speaks again about this living water, some see him as a prophet, others the Christ ... but some cannot get past the fact he comes from Galilee. As if God can be constrained to geographical borders.

But then, perhaps we are not that different ourselves.

Can we have our vision clouded, by a sense that the person speaking might be too young, too uneducated, not the right social class

What are the parameters we put into place in our minds, before we will hear something as authoritative, or not? When are we more liable to forget that God can speak through anyone? Who are the people we are most likely to dismiss?

I remember going to a service at a Community church when we were in Lowestoft, at the beginning of the service, there was a chance for people to share any prophetic words they may have had in the last week. Great, I thought, but then it was a bit more complicated than that, you had to first speak to the elders for them to check it out ... and you couldn't have a prophetic word if you were a visitor. It could be argued there is biblical precedent for this I guess, with Pauls teaching on keeping good order in worship, a general free for all may have been chaotic. But I did leave wondering which voices were never being heard.

Today as we reflect on this passage, let us reflect on those voices which we struggle to hear and let us pray that we God can remove any barriers, giving us open minds to hear his voice, speaking clearly, day by day.

May God bless you

Heather

Psalm 9 Jeremiah 11:18 – 12:6 John 7:53 - 8:11

The gospel of the second chance.

Today's gospel reading from John probably takes place just after the end of the great Jewish Festival of Tabernacles or Booths, in the outer Court of Women in the Temple of Jerusalem – this was where anyone could go to listen to religious teachers. The Pharisees and Scribes are out to arrest Jesus, seeing him as a radical troublemaker whose teaching has impressed all his hearers, even the Temple police. They set a clever trap, using a woman caught in the act of adultery for their own ulterior motives – a pawn in their plot to destroy Jesus.

Adultery was one of the three gravest sins, which included murder and idolatry, and under Jewish law was punishable by death, traditionally by stoning in the case of adultery. A Rabbi would normally be consulted on a difficult legal question, so Jesus by the Pharisees was approached as a Rabbi, with the shocked and fearful woman in tow. The dilemma was whether to condemn this woman to death as an adulteress, which would negate Jesus' gospel of forgiveness of sinners, mercy and love, and also pose a challenge to the Roman authorities who alone could authorise a death sentence. Alternatively, if Jesus forgave the woman, and spared her from being stoned, he would be seen as encouraging people to break the Law of Moses by condoning adultery. No mention of the man involved anywhere; only the woman was guilty, abused and mis-used, a thing, a trap for Jesus.

The Pharisees and Scribes thought they had Jesus cornered. Whatever he decided would lead to his arrest. But he turned the tables on them. "Let the one who has no sin be the first to throw a stone." At least the elders had the insight to know that they were not perfect! No-one is able to condemn the woman, and the crowd gradually dissipates, until only she and Jesus are left.

Jesus does not condone the woman's actions, but he does not condemn her either.

Jesus has "not come to condemn the world, but to save the world" (John 3:17).

Jesus offers her a second chance, an opportunity to change, a challenge to live a different life, to start again, with the belief that with his help she could change her future.

In our world today, we are all too ready to condemn, and we see this in the press, on television, on social media, in our conversations, both private and public. The gospel of Jesus is a protest against such ready condemnation. Jesus is always willing to offer that second chance, that opportunity to change, to re-start, not just to the woman in the Temple, but to each one of us.

A prayer from Nick Fawcett:

Loving God, we lose sight sometimes of what through Christ you can do within us, the way you can change who and what we are, transforming us and making us new, fashioning the most unlikely people into something different, not just on the outside, but deep within. Teach us to trust in your renewing power, your ability to transform all, restoring faith and hope. Amen

God Bless you on your journeying.

Reflection for Wednesday 10 March 2021

Reading John 8:12-30

Theme: Light

Key verse John 8:12 I am the light of the world.

Light is marvellous and something we often take for granted. We walk into a room at night time and just automatically flick a switch and we can see. If we go out on the streets at night the street lights are there to guide us and show us our way. In a couple of weeks time we will be adjusting the clocks and we will have more day light hours. Light, though, can be a blessing and a curse. How many of us have cleaned up a room or the windows and as soon as the light shines on it we can see the bits we've missed or the smudge marks?

Jesus said that he was the light of the world. What does that really mean and what does it mean for us as followers of Jesus? Jesus was there at creation so he created the sun, our physical light source so he is the literal light of the world but he is mainly our spiritual light. You know what it's like when the penny drops and we exclaim 'oh, I see now' well Jesus is the one who makes the penny drop. He show us the way and directs us towards our heavenly destination and he also show us the potholes on our journey.

As I said with any light though it shows us where we've gone wrong too. By reading the bible and thinking about God's commands and statutes we can realise the error of our ways. The light of Jesus on our hearts and lives really does show us the bits we've missed.

If you're looking at your life's smudges as I'm looking at mine you too will realise that we need to apply a bit of a top rated cleaning product. Jesus said that if we confess our he is righteous and just and will forgive us all our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I pray that you will all have a good spring clean and follow the light of Christ in our lives.

God Bless

Steve Adcock

Reflections for Thursday 11th March

Psalms 113

Old Testament: Jeremiah 14

New Testament: John 8: 31-47

Theme: Honour, Praise and Thanksgiving to God

In the world today where there is plenty of choice, plenty of waste, plenty of surplus, the idea of praise and thanksgiving is getting less popular. Praise and thanksgiving seems to relate to need and scarcity where people have less choice and plenty of need. Further the idea of grace has also become less popular where life is in terms of you get what you earn. But in the past year, the world has moved closer to understanding what grace really is, when you can get as a way of favour and compassion what you need. We have seen this through some of the government schemes in helping to reduce the pressure on employers, businesses and families and what seemed random care from friends, neighbours and strangers. In the bible times this was normal and so the idea of grace was easily understood and celebrated with honour, praise and thanksgiving to God. It is through this understanding of grace that Praise and thanksgiving was directed to God who provides for the needs of his people.

Psalm 113 is a Psalm used during the religious festivals such as Passover, Feast of Tabernacles or Pentecost. It is known as the Egyptian Hallel, a celebration of freedom achieved by God's saving act. This saving act of God is undeserved and it is an act of grace. It is a Psalm which seems to resemble the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, when Hannah was granted her request by God and she bore a son Samuel. It is also similar to the Song of Mary the Magnificat when Mary was told she was to give birth to a son Jesus. Both Mary and Hannah burst into Song in praise to God. This Psalm brings forth the same jubilation of thanksgiving and praise for God's act of redemption.

Jeremiah 14 we see how both forces of nature and human forces behave against Israel in the form of a drought and conquest. Israel gets a double blow. Drought [verses 1-6] and conquest [verses 11-12].

Jeremiah prays to God on behalf of the people calling him to intervene [verses 7-9]

Following Jeremiah's prayer God reiterates his position of no grace [verses 14- 19] The chain of grace was broken where God gives them favour and they give him honour, so because they do not honour him he too does not favour them. The dance of grace has been stopped, as no praise and thanksgiving results to no grace. Israel had to start it by honouring God and give him praise and thanksgiving to start the rhythm.

John 8: 31-47 finally, this dance of grace to Israel which in return brings honour, praise and thanksgiving to God is that those who honour God will be the children of Abraham. The point is that same grace used to call Abraham and give him the promise following his obedience is the same grace used for those who honour God today. They will know God's truth. [verses 31-32] The Jews had twisted truth. Verses 33 they deny something they were under Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and currently under Rome, and even then they were rejecting that very person Abraham came for, which is the Jesus they were talking to. [Verses 39-41] By failure to give praise and thanksgiving to God there is failure to see and accept the truth.

In our journey through Lent let us continue to give God his honour and praise and thanksgiving for all he has done and also continues to do, so that we can continue to be under his gracious care. Another name of this grace is blessings, honour God and count your blessings.

Prayer: God help us to give you due honour, praise and thanksgiving as we receive your gracious blessings each day, In Jesus Name we pray. **AMEN**

Friday March 12th 2021

Psalm 139

Have you ever watched a child learn how to ride a bike? My middle son, Jon, has a small business called 'Little Riders' which teaches small children how to ride. After lots of preparation and practice the adult pushes the child off and then runs behind with arms outstretched in case they fall. In this psalm, God is like an adult teaching a child how to ride. 'You hem me in, behind and before.' Verse 5 says. God is simultaneously running behind, before and by our sides, ready to catch us if we fall. The child who is learning has to have confidence that the adult will catch them if they fall. I wonder, are we brave enough to push off? Do we have confidence that God will catch us?



Sometimes God asks us to do scary things. In Matthew's gospel (Matt 14:28) Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and says 'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.' Jesus replies, 'Come.' And you can imagine him standing there with his arms outstretched towards Peter. 'Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.' For one brief moment, Peter takes his feet off the ground and starts to ride his bike.

The psalmist trusts God to keep him safe. Sometimes, we don't let people get to know us completely because we are afraid they will discover something about us that they won't like. But God already knows everything about us, even the number of hairs on our heads (Matt 10:30) and still he accepts and loves us. God is with us through every situation, in every trial - protecting, loving, guiding. He knows and loves us completely.

God is omnipresent - he is present everywhere. Because this is so, you can never be lost to his Spirit This is good news to those who know and love God, because no matter what we do or where we go, we can never be far from God's comforting presence (see Romans 8:35-39)

When a child pushes off and rides on their own for the first time there is always great excitement with the adults heaping praise on the child and a desire to tell the whole world - they might even send video clips to grandparents! God does something similar.

In the parable of the Talents, the master says to the servants who had increased what they had been given, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together.'

I wonder, as we wait to be released from Lockdown, what scary thing might God be asking you to do and will you have the confidence to take your feet off the ground and ride your bike?

xxGillxx

Reflection 13th March (Elisabeth)

Psalm 31; (Jeremiah 16:10-17:4); John 9:1-17

This Lent I am working through a daily "Count your Blessings" as I have done for some years. In the past it has been one prepared by Christian Aid, but this year we have a local one in which will support Kimbilio, a refuge for street children in Lubumbashi in the DR Congo. Long Stratton and Wacton churches have had a link with Kimbilio for some years now. The idea is to give thanks for all the blessings we have which so many people in the world do not have, down to such basic things we take for granted as clean running water and electricity, free education, and so on, and give something towards those who have so little. Each day brings a challenge such as counting all the clothes on one rail in a wardrobe or the number of times we boil the kettle, or working out how many years we have had in education, and adding up a small sum for each to make a total for the day. It really brings home to me just how much we take for granted in our daily lives, and brings a wider perspective on just how much need there is in the world. Jesus calls us to work for his kingdom, whose values include justice for all, wherever they live.

How does this relate to our readings for today? In the Gospel reading we have the account of the healing of the man who had been blind from birth, and Jesus tells his disciples that his blindness was not due to any sin, but would show the work of God in his life. After Jesus had healed the man, the Pharisees questioned him and refused to believe Jesus had been sent by God (in the verses just after today's reading), and Jesus accused them of spiritual blindness as they refused to see who he really was. They were blinkered by their positions and their prejudices. We all need breadth of vision, and to see beyond ourselves to the bigger picture, and following Jesus can help us towards seeing more clearly, as he does. And this can lead us into supporting change for the better, such as buying fairly traded produce, and supporting aid charities.

In times like these, when so much of normal life seems to be on hold, at least for the next few months, it can, understandably, tend to make us focus on ourselves, and on what we long to be able to do. There are some helpful verses in the psalm for today, Psalm 31. The psalmist is praying for God to be a rock of refuge for him because he feels threatened by enemies - in our case of course, it is just the one invisible enemy, not a person. In verse 4 he pleads "free me from the trap that is set for me" and some people do feel trapped by the current restrictions and long to be free. In verse 11 he says "those who see me on the street flee from me" - and we do have to avoid people as we walk on our sometimes narrow paths which can feel very strange. But in verse 14-15 he says "But I trust in you O Lord. I say 'you are my God'. My times are in your hands." And in the closing verse (24), he encourages us all - "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord." That's a really good message for us to hold on to, along with recognising that we do have so many blessings in our lives, and remembering the many who have so much less than we do.