

'The hard truth'

25 2 18

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all who are admitted
 into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things
 that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things that are agreeable to the same.

Our text may be found in today's gospel – Mark chapter 8 and verse 31: 'Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.'

Today is the Second Sunday in Lent and Easter is now just over a month away. Lent, an Old English word meaning to lengthen, is a timely reminder that the days are getting longer and with the Spring Equinox on 21st of next month, our days will be longer than our nights again.

Lent is a time to prepare for Easter: spiritual discipline, a chance for a spiritual health check. And it is interesting to note that today's gospel is a reminder of the real, the actual cost of our redemption: that the man we love and who loves us will

have to first die for us so that we can be redeemed, saved and enabled to come home to him.

Now this hard truth is our text today: 'Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.'

Not good, not pleasant but true and necessary. The twelve disciples were on a high. Jesus had asked them who they thought he was and Peter had articulated what they all now knew: 'You are the Messiah.' (Mk 8 v29)

But the problem is the disciples' understanding what that might mean was not what they were about to hear when Jesus told them the awful truth: his rejection by the Jewish religious authorities, his death then resurrection. And Peter again is motivated to speak. He takes Jesus to one side and tells him that is so not going to be. The word in English is rebuke which means remonstrate. Essentially, Peter is telling Jesus that he doesn't need to go through such pain and suffering in order to achieve what God wills for him. Peter does it out of love, out of friendship, out of care for his teacher, companion and friend.

And then, Peter in turn gets rebuked. Jesus puts Peter firmly in his place. Jesus rejects what Peter has said with an extraordinary exorcism, 'Get behind me Satan' or if you prefer the French « Va t'en Satan ! » You may well recall, too, similar words being used in Matthew's account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and here I quote the AV 'Get thee hence Satan;' (Mat 4v10)

Fact is the cross is central to our salvation. The cost of the cross is suffering and death. There is no easy option. But, out of friendship, Peter tries to save Jesus from the pain anticipated. But, in trying to be kind, Peter has become a mouthpiece for the Devil. How sad when we actually do something evil when we are only motivated by love !

That said, Jesus has the strength of will and the resolve to accept the will of God for him and to embrace what is going to happen to him when they get to Jerusalem for Passover. It is a hard truth that Jesus shares with the twelve. In the light of Easter Day, Good Friday is truly a good day because the will of God is enacted by the Son of God and, as a result, we too may all be children of God, his sons and daughters through Jesus' rejection, pain and suffering.

May we, too, have the will and the resolve to do what God individually intends for each one of us, regardless of the cost.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 37 : The hard truth

