

**‘On the Way with Jesus’
Mark 10 vv32-45**

Today – **‘Sixth Sunday in Lent’** – so I wonder how all those self-imposed ‘givings-up for Lent’ are getting on?? Maybe you’ve given up giving up already? Or maybe you never even started?! Interesting to discover what are the most popular ‘things’ that people ‘give up’ for Lent.

You can probably anticipate what the ‘top ten’ are. These are they, according to last year in the ‘Independent’– **QUOTE**. I won’t ask you afterwards, if you don’t ask me – suffice to say that my wine rack is still gathering dust – 6 weeks in!

Our Bible base for this morning (both OT & Gospel) describe, not so much as a ‘giving up’, as a ‘taking on’ – i.e. the role of the Suffering Servant + description in Mark 10 of Jesus setting out for Jerusalem & thereby, taking on the Way of the Cross.

At the heart of our gospel reading for this morning (**Mark 10vv32-45**) we see Jesus, who prepares to submit himself to the hurt, indignity, injustice, cruelty & pain of crucifixion in quite a different way – the **WAY of the CROSS**.

LEADING the WAY:

QUOTE v32 – Jesus leading the way – both literally & figuratively. The tension mounts as Jesus, plus the twelve & other followers approach the holy city. Some are confused and others just plain frightened. Jesus continues to teach his disciples about both HIS way of discipleship &, in due time, THEIRS (**vv 33-34 & 39**).

Today is remembered in churches around the world as **Passion Sunday**. The Sunday before Palm Sunday – and probably one of those Sundays (certainly in Baptist/Free churches) that can pass by without much notice being given to it.

But we also are following Jesus in this Lent season – from 40 days of trials in wilderness > conflict > suffering > transfiguration > now again another prediction of suffering, but also of the ultimate **victory of the cross (vv33&34)**. For the first time, Jesus now specifically mentions **Jerusalem**, in his predictions about the events about to unravel in that city. City with its explosive ‘cocktail’ of religions, cultures, & politics – then and NOW. Never been anywhere else quite like it.

The dénouement of that first Easter is now very near – Jerusalem is now very near – today Passion Sunday is a day to reflect on the Passion/Suffering of Jesus that we shall be called to witness and then work out our own discipleship in the light of forthcoming events.

‘We may not know, we cannot tell what pains he had to bear’ – so runs the Good Friday hymn. Yet all that suffering is foretold & all that takes place in Passion of Jesus fulfils the Scriptures: ***‘Servant...despised & rejected by men – man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.’*** Once more the words of Is.53 will resonate- ***‘pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.’*** Here in Mark 10 is foretold the punishment that brings us peace, to be placed upon him.

Passion Sunday is a kind of ‘dry run’ for Good Friday. The Church prepares itself, almost steels itself for what lies ahead & for what this season is meant to commemorate & yes, ultimately celebrate. Whilst we wade through stores once more stacked floor to ceiling with Everests of Easter Eggs, bundles of bunnies & shelves chock full of chicks, **we** are asked to pause at the foot of the cross.

There is nothing here to attract – no Oscar award-winning material in this figure, surely? Yet, as we read the gospel narrative (and it pays to read the Passion in one go if you can – from about here on in Mark CHAPTER 10), Jesus, far from being the victim, in fact is the victor. He is in charge, because God is in charge of all these events.

So, we shall read of his Passion – of how Jesus submits himself to be bound, scourged, tried, mocked & crucified, yet showing through it all great dignity & self-control.

‘Led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.’

LOSING the WAY:

When, later Jesus says to Pilate, ***‘you would have no power over me, if it were not given to you from above’ (John 19v11)***, we realise that he is speaking the literal truth. Jesus the victim was free in ways that we almost never experience. In situations of stress (‘S’ word that lies at heart of our millennial culture), most of us act in a bundle of barely understood complexes. Anger, guilt, fear & resentment battle it out within us. We cannot remain passive, but scarcely know what to do.

But Jesus knew exactly who & what he was. He knew the ‘baptism’ that awaited him in Jerusalem, even though his closest followers did not (**vv 37 & 38**). Their ‘way’ is to seek the best seats – get all the glory – try to be ‘top dogs’. James & John & rest of the disciples are in danger of ‘losing the plot’ & **‘losing the way’** here.

Contrast the disciples’ arguing amongst themselves with figure of Jesus here. He knew that inward security of God’s love enfolding him, that **we** may fleetingly experience in our following the way of the cross. What Jesus spells out here to contending, confused and fearful followers is the **way of victory**, not defeat, the **way of triumph**, not of despair, the **way of life**, not of death.

In the letter to Hebrews (chapter 9), we find all that talk of the blood of goats & calves – which is so alien to our understanding of doing anything for us in sight of God. But the writer is simply seeking to draw a contrast (theme of whole letter), between the old ways of ritual & a formal holiness, with the sacrifice of Christ, which once & for all brings an inward change in us and in our relationship with God.

Here is the mediator of the new covenant on this road to Jerusalem, about to fulfil Jeremiah's 'New Covenant' prophecy, as he meets with friends in an upper room.

And then goes out to face the darkness of Calvary. Here is the ultimate love that bears all things – God so loving the world that he gives his only Son. 'Church' is not meant to be some kind of coned off Christian area in the community, nor in the world - but at the heart of the community – KNOWING, SHOWING & GROWING Christ in the community in MISSION – the '**Sowing, Reaping, Keeping**', Mission of Jesus Christ.

And if the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, giving his life as ultimate evidence, then so we too are called to follow, in same spirit.

'Giving his life as ransom – for many/all' cf. Peterson '...then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage'. Yet how few this Easter in UK will find those words having much impact on their lives. The TV news may give us a few seconds of Justin Welby's Easter day sermon from Canterbury, we may hear the Pope give his blessing in St. Peter's in Rome – and that will be it.

And amidst all the chocolate sold & consumed, there will remain the *'liquorice all sorts'* spirituality & belief. *'It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere' > 'Religion is a private affair' > 'All roads lead to God' > 'Everyone will get to heaven anyway, because God is decent sort of chap & besides, he's English.'*

LOOKING to the WAY:

When in full-time ministry, as season of Easter approached each year – so I used to look forward to the journey ahead of us. Although the busiest season for ministers in terms of frequency of services, it was always good to be able to take church through every aspect of Easter.

Not always possible, of course, but I used to encourage folk to be at EVERY service – from **Palm Sunday > Maundy Thursday > Good Friday > Easter Day** (6!) a.m. & p.m.

Some would be in church for Palm Sunday ('Hosannas'!) – not see them until Easter morning). 'Where were you – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday?? Of course, I never actually said that to them!

But in a 'complete Holy Week' as it were, there is a real sense of having journeyed with Jesus through intimacy of that Upper Room to the agony of Gethsemane & Golgotha & on to the light & joy of Easter morning + first resurrection appearances.

And so, as we prepare ourselves for this season that lies at heart of what we believe, we too are called to **follow on** behind Jesus, nearer & nearer to Jerusalem. On this Passion Sunday morning, we are asked to consider three-dimensional portrait of Jesus. One who is:

- 1) **SAVIOUR of the WORLD** – cry '*It is finished!*' – cosmic & eternal consequences.
- 2) **PERSONAL SAVIOUR**, who knows, loves & cares for each one of us. '*My Jesus, My Saviour*' may not be the kind of modern song that we are all comfortable with. Indeed, there is always the danger (in evangelical circles at least) of an over emphasis on the individual salvation package. But truth is that Jesus IS my Saviour & in my better moments, my '*Lord & my God*' as well. We should not be afraid to recognise the wonderful truth of that.
- 3) **HEAD of the CHURCH**, the COMMUNITY of BELIEF – here exemplified with Jesus & 12 + other followers in midst of their confusion & fear.

Those who remain outside the community will never appreciate what it means to belong to it. 'Open Secret' of the Gospel of JC.

(UK about to discover the actual reality of 'living outside' the European Union – for better – or worse.)

Each Sunday morning- moment in prayer – all the CHURCHES – all the COMMUNITIES been our privilege to minister in - Histon > Stock > Crowthorne > Huntingdon > Wade St...Not forgetting countless fellowships in SW & Wales.

LEADING the WAY> LOSING the WAY > LOOKING to the WAY
>**LIVING the WAY**

But wherever, whenever & however it meets – Church is a Community of the Cross. Thankful for our 'settlements' in ministry down the past years – but always challenging too – church should never be a 'cosy 'community...'Cosiness' & **Way of the CROSS** do not sit well together.

The Victory of the cross is seen whenever men & women live lives of service to their fellow human beings, not thinking of their own profit or advantage. It is Christ in us who overcomes not only our natural selfishness & self regard, but also our fears for the future.

Few of us are likely to be called to sacrifice on such a grand scale as the great martyrs of past & present day. Mostly in our church life together (in & outside this building), it is not heroics that are called for, but faithfulness – such as Wade St knows here week in, week out'

But often faithfulness coupled with Holy Spirit boldness. We too are called to live for God's glory. Too often churches busy themselves with maintenance not mission. As if the main task is to preserve the Church as we have known it - against all comers.

Not true of Wade St – '*Church at the heart of the city with Christ at the heart of the church*' – '*Place of Welcome*' - '*House of Prayer*'.

**LEADING the WAY > LOSING the WAY > LOOKING to the WAY
> LIVING the WAY**

'Passus' from the Latin...

On this Passion Sunday, we need men & women who have a passion for Jesus Christ, who understand the victory of the Cross & who seek to live out that victory, in the face of all that may take place on the way up to 'Jerusalem' & beyond.