

## Tuesday of Holy Week's Reflection

### The Disciples' Calling and Preparation of the Way of the Cross...and Jesus's Transition – to inhabiting his role of Son of Man, Son of God....

#### On the Garden Bench

The Gospel of St Matthew begins with the explanation of Jesus's genealogy, his family line. Then the account of his birth and his Baptism. This is followed by the description of Jesus's 40 days and nights being tempted by the devil in the desert. This experience was to prepare him inwardly; to strengthen him by his Father God, for an itinerant ministry, without a permanent home or family around him, which would be full of temptations and fraught with challenges. Jesus needed great patience, prompted by the love and compassion he had for all those he met, and especially of course for the disciples, who had no idea what following him would really mean. How could they understand who he was when, long awaited though the Messiah had been, he just appeared on the shore of Lake Galilee, indeed a cameo of what they'd later experience, when he joined them for a BBQ, after he'd risen from the dead.

Jesus's teaching begins with the Sermon on the Mount – it's really challenging about what will lay ahead for him and what therefore may be the consequence for any disciples, culminating in the outcome to all suffering through following Jesus "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted **the prophets who were before you**".

The disciples have a new genealogy; a new family, that is, the prophets, about whom up till now they've only heard tell. They are now to take up their baton. The first teaching which follows reminds the disciples of the framework of being God's people...connecting Jesus as the Fulfilment of the Law, relating to the Ten Commandment, which were given to that great Leader Moses, leading to "Do not worry about what you will eat and drink or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more Important than food and the body more than clothes....?"

Indeed, Jesus's life certainly was more important than what could be seen by human sight and so would the call be on their lives. Yet Jesus continually encourages the disciples "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. He relates to their humanity, as human fathers with the analogy of "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?". Maybe Jesus is also reassuring the disciples, now removed from their own livelihoods for their families, that everyone is looked after in this life, but of course, he is always, also, pointing to the next life too.

### **Cross 1**

The first conversation Matthew records is in chapter 8. Jesus had been healing many sick people. A teacher of the law said "I will follow you wherever you go". The cost of discipleship starts to roll out, when Jesus replies: "Foxes have

holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another disciple said “Lord, let me go and bury my father”. But Jesus told him, “Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead”.

Harsh? Or just completely honest? This call to follow him requires total commitment – Jesus has already taught the disciples recorded in Matthew chapter 6: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you”. The pathway of a disciple requires faith, not sight. It is strengthened by trust.

And the first test of this trust is recorded by Matthew straight afterwards. The disciples were in what for several of them we might call their ‘comfort zone’... as at this stage those called were all fishermen, out in a boat on the Lake.

## **Cross 2**

Without warning a furious storm blows up. These disciples were **experienced fishermen** and they panicked “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

Would the disciples have coped better, if the storm had been spotted coming in the distance and they could prepare? Was Jesus, there in the boat asleep, teaching them that trust is for all times of temptation and confusion? There is no comfort zone. They may need to stand the ground, without time to prepare. It’s all about trust – faith in Jesus at all times – even if he is asleep.

Jesus did calm the storm, saying “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”...The men were amazed – they were only

human, but this question raised by them suggested they were just at the start of realising who Jesus was “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” They have yet to comprehend that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

### **Cross 3**

Jesus is on the other side of the Lake and now another important part of the disciples’ preparation. Jesus meets two men. People demon-possessed, outcasts and misunderstood and the objects of fear. These demons, **by contrast to the disciples**, immediately recognise Jesus as **the “Son of God”!** These spirits rendered the men, through their possession, ‘out of control’. Jesus released the men from this oppression, bringing the demons under his control. Here Jesus shows he’s not just a Healer, he is recognised by the demons as the Son of the Almighty God.

Then here comes the first threat....the people saw him and pleaded with him to leave their region. When the storm of lack of understanding blows up, trust in Jesus **has** to be the response.

### **Cross 4**

Jesus has healed many physically. He has healed the emotionally, demon-possessed and now he’s back **on the shore of his own town**. He has had a bit of time building up to this point, which may have made him nervous. Mark records in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of his Gospel “Jesus said “Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house, is a prophet without honour”.

It must have given Jesus a real encouragement when the encounter first recorded by Matthew is with some men who brought a paralysed man for him to heal. Jesus saw their faith and he taught something else to the disciples. This wasn't only physical, or emotional illness. Here was a man who was spiritually bound by sin, of guilt or shame, with physical manifestations.

And then the first clash with the Teachers of the Law, who were appalled at what they took to be blasphemy – this man declaring he could forgive sins..... Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, with authority on earth to forgive....the crowd saw it and were filled with awe – yes praising God, but to Him as the one giving authority to men....not seeing Jesus as God. Now Jesus was really 'nailing his colours to the mast'..

### **Cross 5**

And now a new learning point for the disciples who, so far, are fishermen: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew and James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Jesus sees Matthew, a tax collector, who responds to the call to follow him. Later Jesus meets with him and other tax collectors and those who were reputedly dishonest and unjust, often oppressing the poor. The next controversy begins – Jesus has come to reach out in love and justice and forgiveness to all those who know they need healing....he's not come to those who think they are well and quite above and beyond the need of salvation.

### **Cross 6**

Jesus has come not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles and to anyone in any part of society. Jesus touches, or is available to be touched by the untouchable. Up till now healing has been specifically reported by Matthew with men. Now we have a woman who would have been totally disregarded by the society of the day, yet with such faith in him that she believed if only she touched the hem of his garment her bleeding of 12 years, which rendered her unclean, would be healed. And then there was the ruler who approached Jesus himself to heal his child .... Now we have the first reported healing from the dead, **in Jesus's home town.**

### **Cross 7**

The Gospel of Mark records Jesus continuing to heal on the Sabbath Day, which was considered unlawful. But Jesus was showing he'd come not to just do away with the Law, but to fulfil the Law. He was the New Wine and his teaching was for new wineskins – new ways of appreciating the love of and the service to his Father and everyone's Father. So he challenges the Pharisees's horror at what he was doing on the Sabbath Day by saying "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" and asking "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or do to evil, save life or to kill?"

Tension is rising within all those connected with the Teachers of the Law, the Pharisees and all those connected with the Synagogue. Excitement and expectation is rising within the crowd following Jesus.

The next stage has arrived in Jesus's transition as Leader. Mark records the calling of the seven disciples, from those who had been following him, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, adding to the five already recorded in Matthew's Gospel.

### **Cross 8**

Now there is a crossroads for Jesus. He goes in a house and the crowd is so big that he can't even eat. Mark records "when his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said "He is out of his mind"." And the teachers of the Law declare "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons"! So here is a huge test of Jesus, taking him back to the desert where he stood the ground in great need in the face of the devil's temptations. Indeed that was a training ground for him, as he's now accused of being in league with the devil himself.

It's when Mark records Jesus's Mother and brother arriving that the transition is really evident...as Jesus looks at those seated in a circle around him and says "Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother"!.

Jesus is not understood or accepted by his own family, nor by the Leaders around him. What about the disciples – are they going to get Jesus's teaching? Are they going to really get to know Him?

### **Cross 9**

Both in Matthew and Mark's Gospels, we have the account of Jesus going through the towns and the villages preaching and healing, teaching the disciples by his example.

The fundamental characteristic he was portraying was to have compassion on the people who were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

This was the springboard for the disciples to be his ambassadors .... To become his apostles.... For them to realise what it means to be sent out into the harvest field, to deliver a message of repentance, forgiveness, healing, restoration and hope....in the Almighty God, welcoming all to his Family. He was pointing not to a God who was apart and accessible only through the rites and rituals of the priest, but through their personal relationship with Him, their Saviour and the Messiah.

### **Cross 10**

We are Jesus's disciples. More than ever before we need to stand the ground and live out God's message of love; a Message of Good News, to the harassed and helpless, to people, who are like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus Christ's message is wrapped up in repentance, forgiveness, healing, restoration and hope...of course the disciples didn't realise the eternal aspect of this yet. They were still learning about the earthly implications. We have the advantage of the whole story....



## **At the Garden Table**

### **Let us pray;**

Lord God, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, may we be a people your flock, with your passion and the light of your love planted in our hearts.

May we be a people who stand the ground in the face of injustice, with compassion and the warmth of your acceptance and understanding.

May we be a people who flourish and bear fruit, through the faith which comes through courage and confidence, because we trust in you preparing us more and more, to be rooted in your Gospel and the communities where you place us.

May we be a people of faith in you, in this time when we may feel harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Lord God, please help us trust that you are our Shepherd and to stick close to you.

**Amen.**