

TAKE TIME OUT - *Pastoral Retreat*

Sunday Scriptures: 30th August 2020 **Revd Janice Morgan**

Matthew 16:21-28 The Cross & Self Denial

²¹“From that time on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it Lord! This must never happen to you.” ²³But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” ²⁴Then Jesus told the disciples, “If any want to become My followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷For the Son of Man is to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.”

Scripture Reflection: God before self.

The words of Jesus concerning His suffering and death are straight from the prophecy of David ([Psalm 22](#)). The disciples should have recognised it but they did not make the connection with Jesus. Peter so loves Jesus that he can't bear the thought of Him putting Himself in danger and subsequently tries to counsel Jesus out of such action. Oh the subtlety of temptation! It is all too easy to do and say all the wrong things for all the right reasons and all the right things for all the wrong reasons! Those who are closest to us and love us the most can be used by Satan to persuade us from God's chosen path. We recognise this in Scripture many times but especially in Job. His so-called comforters; friends who meant well but actually made things worse by telling Job he must somehow be in the wrong when he was not! Peter was but a human being with a big heart and all too often subject to emotional reaction. We too can fall to the same deception and become a stumbling block, having our mind set on human things rather than divine Truths.

Each time we seek to protect ourselves, or those we love, from pain and suffering we subject ourselves to the danger of turning down the wrong path. Beware the path of shadowy grey areas that leads away from God and His all sufficient grace. Remember the subtle twisting of Truth by Satan in the Garden of Eden, ‘*Did God say...?*’ ([Genesis 3:1-7](#)). This path will turn our lives inward; cause us to lose sight of our intended purpose and result in a slow spiritual death under a sort of anaesthetic fog. Following Jesus means obedience to God; True commitment and determination with no turning back, even at the risk of death. Self-denial is not about giving up luxuries or sacrificing what is surplus to requirement. It is all about putting God first and Jesus at the centre of life over and above self-indulgence. Our place is not to lead according to our own preferences but to repeat in anguished prayer, “Yet, not my will but Yours be done” ([Luke 22:42](#)).

We are called to stand out from the crowd not blend in! We are called to challenge wrongdoing not find excuses for it! We are called to speak Truth and expose Truth not bend it into a falsehood or turn a blind eye! How else can justice be done and be seen to be done? This is what Jesus means by taking up our cross! How can we restore righteousness and keep the body of Christ pure if we are not fastidious in our cleansing? Consider the recent situations in Christchurch New Zealand and Kenosha America. Two very different situations but both are undoubtedly examples of the most heinous killings. Consider for a moment the

contrast in responses of those emotionally distraught at losing loved ones and yet, while having the courage to speak out against such evil, do so in a way that calls for justice with peace. On the other hand, what of those in the same situations, yet, despite not being personally bereaved, demand their rights with menace and destruction? Christianity is not a warm duvet to curl up under all comfy and cosy with no concern for what's going on while we sleep. We must wake up and remember; we are here to influence others for God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. If our priorities get out of focus how will our own souls be saved, let alone be used by Christ in saving the souls of others? Our salvation depends upon our trust of Jesus and our heavenly Father. If we lead our own life, go our own way, and follow where the world tempts us, we reject everything God intends and Jesus died for.

We are called to be real with our faith, not to pretend at being something we are not. We are called to stand against injustice, whatever its guise. We are called to be open and transparent so that all may see and hear how different our attitude and behaviour is to that of the world. We all make mistakes but lamenting before God is a healthy and liberating exercise for the soul, like a good dose of liver salts for the body. Repentance features repeatedly in the Word of God and the teaching of Jesus. Let us develop the habit of being honest, with ourselves and with others. Let our prayers reveal the deepest thoughts of our human nature and be sorry for them. In this way we will discover the reality of Jesus' understanding and demonstrate it.

When the world advocates wrongdoing, however subtle, or doubt threatens our faith, God hopes that we will trust Him and His Son, no matter what. Jesus will return with His angels to judge and all, without exception, will be repaid for what they have or have not done. The stark warning in the words of Jesus points to time running out. His words urge us to 'repent and believe' ([Mark 1:15](#) & many other references to repentance). For all that we get wrong in this life let us get one thing right: Make Christ the centre of our life and nothing and no one will succeed in leading us from God's intended path. As the witness of Stephen reveals, even at our last we will see, 'the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' ([Acts 7:55-56](#)) 'coming in His Kingdom'. And all God's people say...**Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Healing Streams by John Hartley; Stuart Townend & Kelly Minter

CD: The Best Celtic Worship Album in the World...Ever! **Disc: 2 Track: 13**

Will You hide me in Your shelter
Will You shade me with Your wings
When the heat of day consumes me
Let me drink from healing streams
Drink from healing streams

Will You lift my heavy burdens
Will You pave my path with peace
And when the road is steep and stony
Let me bathe in healing streams
Bathe in healing streams

When the joy of morning tarries
When the waves of darkness roll
Will You shine Your light of faithfulness
Giving courage to my soul
Courage to my soul

Will You lead me to repentance
Will You make temptations flee
When I'm filled with condemnation
Will You show Your scars to me
Show Your scars to me

And in the place where trouble waits
Lord I shall not fear
The Comforter, the Counsellor
The Saviour is here

Will You hide me in Your shelter
Will You shade me with Your wings
When the heat of day consumes me
Let me drink from healing streams
Drink from healing streams

Poem: THE CALL ©Janice Morgan-1990

The Lord is calling us today,
His gentle whisper comes our way,
We hear, will we obey?
Jesus calls to us and He cries for us,
Will we come or will we stay?

We live our lives as best we can,
To follow Jesus is our plan,
We struggle on our own.
Shall we let Him come, shall God's will be done,
Shall our lives be ours or His?

Jesus said, "I am the Light,
In darkness I will shine out bright,
My love will touch your heart.
Will you turn from sin, will you let Me in,
Can I turn your life around"?

He loves us all the scriptures say,
He died and took our sins away,
Can we believe this truth?
Can we just let go, tears will surely flow,
On our knees we softly pray.

We feel our heart, it's beating fast,
We've given Jesus all our past,
Repentance is the key.
We can face all strife, we have found new life,
Jesus' Spirit lives in us.
Jesus' Spirit lives in us!

Prayer:

Father God, prevent us from becoming a stumbling block; Lord Jesus Christ, help us to keep our mind on divine things; Holy Spirit, bless us with the strength of faith to deny self, take up our cross and follow the Lord to eternity. **Amen!**