

Call to Worship – Holy Tuesday, March 30th

Turn away from the calls of worldly success.

Repent, and turn back to God.

Turn away from the desire to have what everyone else has.

Repent, and turn back to God.

Turn away from greed and the race for power.

Repent, and turn back to God.

As we approach the Cross, may we turn back to God.

May we seek forgiveness,

May we seek healing,

May we seek wholeness.

May our hearts be renewed in this time of worship.

Opening Hymn: 221 O dearest Lord

Opening Prayer:

Forty days alone, a wilderness of thoughts, tempting and inviting thoughts, which could so easily have distracted you from your task, your mission, your vision. Yet you emerged, stronger and more attuned to all that had to be done, despite a time constraint that to our eyes would have seemed hopeless.

We too live in stressful times. Demands are made of our time, that leave so little for the important things of life. We are easily distracted in the wilderness of our lives, by every call to go this way or that, to turn stone to bread, to leap from mountains, and do all that would keep us from the truth. We listen to the voices of this world, and ignore the one who endured all this and so much more, and emerged triumphant, that we might not have to suffer so.

Forgive us, Father, when we get distracted from our task. Forgive us those times when we try to be all things to all people, and fail to be anything to anyone.

You Lord Jesus were a man of suffering, acquainted with grief, loved and despised in equal measure. You understand humanity, know our failings, love us despite the people that we are.

When we, like Peter, deny you by word or action, forgive us.

When we, like Judas, are tempted to follow a different path, forgive us.

When we, like those in the crowd allow you to be crucified, forgive us. Bring us to the foot of the Cross to stand next to the one who, looking into your eyes declared 'Surely this is the Son of God'. We pray this in Jesus' name,
Amen

Psalm 71:1-14

In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

2 In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;

turn your ear to me and save me.

3 Be my rock of refuge,

to which I can always go;

give the command to save me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.

4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,

from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.

5 For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord,

my confidence since my youth.

6 From birth I have relied on you;

you brought me forth from my mother's womb.

I will ever praise you.

7 I have become a sign to many;

you are my strong refuge.

8 My mouth is filled with your praise,

declaring your splendour all day long.

9 Do not cast me away when I am old;

do not forsake me when my strength is gone.
10 For my enemies speak against me;
those who wait to kill me conspire together.
11 They say, “God has forsaken him;
pursue him and seize him,
for no one will rescue him.”
12 Do not be far from me, my God;
come quickly, God, to help me.
13 May my accusers perish in shame;
may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.
14 As for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.

Mark 12: 18-34

Marriage at the Resurrection

18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection[c] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

24 Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’[d]? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

The Greatest Commandment

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[e] 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’[f] 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[g] There is no commandment greater than these.”

32 “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Meditation

Last night, John talked about the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders. They were people who had basically decided who Jesus was and they did not like the answer. They preferred to see him as someone who was speaking and teaching against the Jewish faith than being part of it. They are willing to throw these two questions at Jesus “By what authority are you doing these things?” , “And who gave you authority to do this?” so that they could scoff at his answer. That was the plan until Jesus beat them at their own game asking a question that they would not answer.

Next the Pharisees and the Herodians came to attempt to trap Jesus into making a verbal claim to being the Messiah. They try to get Jesus to say something against Caesar. They throw this question to him. “Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” I am not sure that there is a winning answer to this question. Jesus is

probably damning himself is he says yes or if he says no. If Jesus said yes then he would be seen as siding with the Roman Empire - which he had never done. If Jesus said no then he would be speaking treason and the Pharisees and teachers of the law could take this information to Pontius Pilate who was in Jerusalem as well. Jesus again answered in such a way that it was a very unsatisfying answer for the Pharisees and Herodians. The people who were watching were amazed but the Jewish religious leaders were looking quite foolish.

This brings us to this evening's readings from the book of Mark. The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders tried one more time to trap Jesus with theological questions. This time they sent the Sadducees to do the asking of the question. This time with this type of question, they are sure that they are going to be able make Jesus look foolish in front of the crowd. They were sure that this one was the winner. If Jesus spoke against Moses, the prophet, then the crowd would no longer see him as this great teacher, this saviour, this messiah.

The writer of this gospel tells you right from the beginning that this question is complete foolishness. The Sadducees are asking a question about life after death when they do not believe in the resurrection. Their question shows that they do not really care about the living either. Why would anyone want to create a scenario where a woman lost seven husbands? That is awful! Then to add to this horrible scenario, the Sadducees make her childless. This is an absolutely terrible scenario that they have created for a woman to live out. The question from this scenario should have been 'who is responsible for helping this woman live?' However, the question the Sadducees ask is 'who will be her husband in the afterlife?' Now I could be missing some other importance to this question but to me the Sadducees are simply showing that they do not care about the living or the dead. They only seem to care about themselves and keeping this lifestyle that they have which has been called out by Jesus several times.

Jesus answers this question in such a way everyone is in awe of his

answers. Everyone. Including one of the teachers of the law. He decided to also give a question to Jesus because he was enjoying Jesus' skill as answering. He asks "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Notice that Jesus takes this question which is an honest question and immediately gives a clear answer. 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'" The teacher of the law was very impressed with this answer and added that these were more important than burnt offerings or sacrifices. Jesus told him that he was very close to the Kingdom of God.

These two texts are separated in our Bibles with black headings but Mark, the writer, clearly connects this question about the widow and this question about the greatest commandment. Maybe Jesus was trying to point out that if the chief priests, teachers of the law, the elders, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees focussed on the law which they claimed to know so well their interests would differ and therefore, their questions would be different. It is worth noticing that Mark makes mention of widows twice more in these days and hours before his arrest. Maybe Jesus is saying that if these people really followed the two most important commandments then they would have questions that were about the people around them. I mean I am sure that there were some very good questions to ask Jesus about widows. After all this is what makes the Christian community stand out in the Book of Acts. The Christian community looks after the women who suddenly find themselves to be widows and in a precarious place.

I think these texts ask us to make sure that we are living by these two most important commandments. If we do, we will be worshipping God and wondering who is our neighbour and how do we support them. That is one thing I have noticed in the Gospels, Jesus was always seeing the people who needed him. Even as he was heading to Jerusalem, he saw blind Bartimaeus. Even on the cross, he took note of the man who was on a

cross beside him. We are never to be so focussed on God and strange theological questions that we do not notice those around us who need our attention.

Only the last question and answer led to the person being close the kingdom of God. Let us follow that advice and find ourselves being close to the kingdom of God as well.

Closing Prayer

God of our lives,

Six weeks ago we gathered to begin our Lenten journey. Since that day of ashes, we have journeyed day by day to Jerusalem, to the procession of palms and hosannas, to the temple and to the streets, to the Garden of Gethsemane and what lies beyond.

It has not been an easy journey. We have been stretched and challenged in ways we could not foresee, as we will continue to be in the days to come. We are grateful, God, that we have not been alone on this way. We are grateful that you have been with us all the while, supporting us and comforting us even as You confront us and challenge us.

And we are so grateful that we have had each other as travelling companions. You have created us to be in community with each other, and in days like this as we ponder the Cross we know why. Thank you for this sacred community of fellow travellers, cast in your image, shaped by your love. Help us, as we follow Jesus together, to broaden our concept of community, to include not only those we know and love, but also strangers both near and far, and, yes, even our enemies and those who hate us.

Capture our hearts and minds with a vision of your kingdom, and inspire us to work tirelessly to bring it to be in this world.

You have shown us, God, what is right and just; you have shown us what it means to love as you love. In Christ, you have shown us what it means

to give everything to this call, to live lives of radical obedience, radical humility, radical love.

Lord, may we live our lives with such determination and focus that we might find the courage to lay aside the pleasures, comforts, and needs of our own lives in order to give life to others—indeed, abundant life for all.

God, you call us to be a part of your kingdom; you call us to lead others to it. So hear us now as we pray for the coming of that kingdom, in the words Jesus taught us long ago.

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us, this day, our daily bread,
And forgive us of our sins,
As we forgive those who have sinned against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever, and ever.
Amen.

Hymn 242 What Wondrous love is this

Benediction

4 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.