

Saturday 13 April 2019

Scripture: Ezekiel 37: 21-28; Psalm: Jeremiah 31: 10-13; John 11: 45-56

The Lord says:

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The Jewish people live in hope that, one day, this prophecy will be fulfilled. Even though the state of Israel has been created, it is far from being a place of peace. On the threshold of Holy Week, we might pray for that whole area and remember the love God has for it – his desire that all people should be cared for by one king – one shepherd – that it would be place God would dwell – and his presence witness to the covenant of love between God and his people. It was a place that Jesus knew and loved and tomorrow we will commemorate his entry into the city of Jerusalem – and over the days that follow, mark the events that ensued.

- Why do you think we are reminded of God's love for Israel and her people on the threshold of Holy Week?
- What would the world look like with the Holy Land and surrounding area at peace?

Pray today for the peoples of the Holy Land – and those who are gathering there to experience the events of Holy Week in the streets and buildings associated with the last days of Jesus' earthly life.

GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE AND MERCY:

Making things New



5th Sunday of Lent Sunday 7 April 2019

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Saturday 13 April 2019

Sunday 7 April 2019

Scripture: Isaiah 43: 16-21; Psalm 125(126); Philippians 3: 8-14; John 8: 1-11

*Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

Isaiah is again offering hope to a people in Exile – promising that God is going to do something new and unexpected – in fact, has started to do it already. Before that, though, Isaiah gives a reminder of God’s credentials. It is all too easy for people to dismiss the prophet’s words as wishful thinking so Isaiah reminds them of the great deeds of the past. One of the mightiest was creating a path through the Sea of Reeds (the Red Sea was, apparently, a misprint). This event was etched in the collective memory of the people and would definitely have reminded people of how powerful God is. If he could part waters then he can surely free his People.

- How does reminding people of God’s past deeds help to convince them about his actions in the future?
- What would be your special memories of God’s actions in your own life?

Spend some time today looking back over your life and seeing where God has acted to help you get through difficult circumstances or make tough decisions. You might like to jot them down in a spiritual journal as something to back to in challenging situations in the future.

Friday 12 April 2019

Scripture: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 17(18); John 10:31-42

*Jeremiah writes:
For I hear many whispering:
‘Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!’
All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.
...
But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonour
will never be forgotten.*

Jeremiah was someone who knew all about persecution – and even experienced it at the hands of those he considered to be good friends. In the midst of such pain, it would have been easy to take it into himself – to allow it to build resentment and bitterness. Jeremiah did express some of those feelings but also had the sense to refer his case to the Lord – which, actually, comes across as pretty serious complaining. At heart, though, Jeremiah’s trust remains firm. He believes that God will vindicate him – even when the Lord delays in doing so.

- What does Jeremiah’s endurance in the face of persecution teach you?
- What is the difference between revenge and people getting their just desserts?

Pray today for those who feel betrayed by their friends – those they should have been able to trust. If you are in this situation bring your pain and anger into your prayer and ask for God’s support and encouragement as you work out your way forward.

Thursday 11 April 2019

Scripture: Genesis 17: 3-9; Psalm 104(105); John 8: 51-59

Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.'

Abram has been proven his trust in the Lord and his willingness to enter into a covenant with him. It must have seemed incomprehensible to the desert wanderer where the highest role was that of a head of household – albeit a large one – that his descendants would include kings. And still he trusted and God gave him a new name – a name that means Father to the Nations. Abraham was far from perfect but God did not expect perfection – just someone who would honour the covenant of love and take the actions God laid before them.

- What do you make of God taking the initiative to enter into a covenant with the nomadic Abram?
- What do you think Abraham made of all the promises God made to him?

Try to imagine the lifestyle of Abram, Sara and their household. It is very alien to us but build up the image of Bedouin tents – flocks looking for water and food – never having a settled home. Reflect on whether this opens people up to what God might want to do in their lives – and how you might create your own temporary “wilderness” in which to allow God to work.

Monday 8 April 2019

Scripture: Daniel 13: 1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 (or Daniel 13: 41-62); Psalm 22(23); John 8: 12-20

Because of the false testimony of the elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed their accusations of adultery and condemned Susanna to death.

Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, 'O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!'

Susanna was a woman of great beauty but had refused the advances of the elders who took their revenge by laying false charges against her. As a woman, her word barely counted and certainly not when set against the powerful men ranged against her. She turned to the only person likely to listen – though could have had little hope that God would intervene strongly enough. Incredibly, it is a young boy in the crowd who listens to the voice of God and who challenges the judgement... Read the rest of the account [here](#) to see what happens!

- What does today's incident tell us about power and vulnerability – especially between rich and powerful men and a woman with neither?
- Have things changed?

Pray today for those who have been falsely accused – especially those who do not have anyone to stand up for them or plead their case.

Tuesday 9 April 2019

Scripture: Numbers 21: 4-9; Psalm 101(102); John 8: 21-30

The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The people had been complaining about the unsatisfying food God had provided for them and wanted to go back to Egypt. They interpret a plague of deadly snakes as judgement from God and beg forgiveness. God's suggestion seems very odd – particularly after condemning the people for making a golden calf idol. Placing a model snake on a pole does not make sense to a modern reader – but looking at it seems to have been an effective way of healing those who had been bitten. It seems to have reminded the people of their dependence on God – and his willingness to help them if they turn back to him.

- What do you make of the remedy for a snake bite?
- How does what happens in the Reading remind the people of what God is doing for them?

Read the account in today's Reading and put yourself in the shoes of someone like you out there in the wilderness, living on manna and the odd bit of honey and occasional quail – and think about how you might feel. Then take it forward to the coming of the poisonous snakes – and Moses' remedy. It may be difficult at first as it is a different culture – but people have changed little over the centuries and you may still have insights that help you to understand the scripture more deeply.

Wednesday 10 April 2019

Scripture: Daniel 3:14-20,24-25,28; Canticle: Daniel 3: 52-56; John 8:31-42

Nebuchadnezzar said to the brothers, 'Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?'

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defence to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.'

Nebuchadnezzar was a king at the height of his power. He would have worshipped the local gods and, it seems likely, that the golden statue was of himself sending out the message that he was a god too. People who have such a grandiose opinion of themselves really do not want to be opposed – even by three people whom he had previously held in high esteem. It would have been far easier for the brothers to do as the king demanded – maybe offering a prayer to God explaining why they were doing it. Instead, they chose the far harder option of staying firm to their consciences and taking the dreadful consequences of their decision.

- Where do people find the courage to make decisions like the three brothers'?
- Why do some people need to be in such positions of power like that of Nebuchadnezzar – where they are seen as gods – at least by themselves?

Pray today for those who are facing horrendous choices like this – especially where it is due to someone forcing them to go against their faith.