

LENT 2

Today's Gospel does not encourage in us any sentimentality. The meek and mild Jesus we may have been taught about as children has grown into an adult, and a complaining one too: 'Go and tell that fox'...

We have enough contemporary examples of how deceitful politicians can be, but not just politicians. We also know how brave and inspiring politicians can be, not least the leader of Ukraine, but there are many other prophets in our midst, are there not, people who live for the sake of truth and honesty even if that is quite different from keeping the 'status quo'? They are the ones who remain focussed and who concentrate on the work in hand.

Jesus' words match his actions: 'I am curing the sick and mentally ill. I am doing what I feel called to do' but all the time he is talking about those 'end days' which will lead us to the foot of the cross just outside Jerusalem. And that's what this season and 'wilderness' period is all about. It is why we sing our 'Kyries', wherever they are from! We call upon the Lord's grace and mercy to stay in that moment, however painful, and confess our cruelty whether it be indiscriminate bombing or stones of cruel words which can so easily destroy, instead of build-up, any sense of grace or humility.

What Jesus is saying here, both eloquently and powerfully, is that he could not cancel or postpone Good Friday, any more than St Paul could cancel or postpone his destiny to become a citizen of heaven. But God's work and vocation in us is surely

to stand up against hypocrisy; against the impersonal but still inflammatory language of the cowardly crowd who just shout out for 'Barabbas'...

We have to just work, campaign, and hold out for justice and mercy and peace despite all the world's oppressive lack of vision. In a cry of heartfelt frustration, Jesus lamented:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing." Many of you will remember that great 1st World War Anglican priest known affectionately as 'Woodbine Willie' and his great poem 'Indifference'. Here's just a taster from verses two and three:

"When Jesus came to Birmingham,
They simply passed Him by;
They never hurt a hair of Him,
They only let Him die.
For men had grown more tender,
And they would not give Him pain;
They only just passed down the street,
And left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them,
For they know not what they do."
And still it rained the winter rain
That drenched Him through and through.
The crowds went home and left the streets
Without a soul to see;

And Jesus crouched against a wall
And cried for Calvary.”

I came across a TV programme last week with Professor Mary Beard leading a very moving seminar, really, about this whole subject of tears and sorrow and what makes us cry. It can be anything from watching the final scene of *The Sound of Music* to staring deeply into a great work of art, you name it. But how heartening to talk deeply and openly together about something we don't do very often and certainly not in public. But you know, indifference is far crueller an emotion than witnessing our own or another's tears; walking by on the other side, or saying 'Good Friday is nothing to do with me'.

It absolutely is to do with you and I because it is there, stationed under the cross of Christ, that we see the tree of the world's salvation and ours. It is there when Mary's soul was pierced and her new vocation began. So that's why it is good to have the Collect on our weekly pew sheet to take home, and ponder the prayer anew each day. Shall we say it slowly together now?

'Almighty God, by the prayer and discipline of Lent may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings, and by following in his Way may we come to share in his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'