

March 2018



Dear Friends,

On Palm Sunday (Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March this year) it is the tradition of the Church of England to have one of the Passion narratives as the main gospel reading- in fact in St Andrew's we have often had a dramatized version of the passion reading for all to join in with. I have often thought this was premature, and have preferred to have the Palm Sunday narrative (e.g. Luke 19:28-40) as the main gospel reading instead-my reasoning is that we need to stay with Palm Sunday and its triumphant entry and then work our way through Holy Week to realise that the crowds who shouted "hosanna" on Palm Sunday were the same who shouted "crucify" on Good Friday. But in our Lent Group this year, we are using the York Course called "On The Third Day" which is looking at the resurrection of Jesus and its implications for the church. Although we are looking at the resurrection **before** Easter Sunday, I found it had so much to say about the journey of faith which so many of us have experienced- a journey which involves living out of our lives following the pattern of Jesus.

- a) Before the resurrection of abandonment, betrayal, crucifixion (as with Good Friday).
- b) The time of waiting and bewilderment ( as with Holy Saturday)
- c) The time of joy at knowing God's new life and hope. (as with Easter Sunday).

Sometimes our lives are lived out on a sort of plateau- life goes on as before- fairly predictably, and we do what we believe to be right as we have been taught, and in general, things work out right for us (this is the general message of the book of Proverbs, and the Psalms categorised by the scholar Walter Bruggemann calls "Psalms of Orientation e.g. Psalm 100)

But other times we are in the midst of a crisis, caused by events beyond our control or because we have gone wrong in some way. In these times we may find times of "crucifixion" and pain, and wonder where God is in the middle of it all. (Bruggemann calls these psalms "Psalms of Disorientation" e.g. Psalm 22)

At other times we have to wait for an answer- the crisis is passed, but the situation is not quite resolved, like Holy Saturday. (Bruggemann calls these psalms, "Psalms of reorientation" e.g. Psalm 73

At other times we can know that God is on our side and that we are entering in to a new phase of joy and restoration, like Easter Sunday (Psalm 118).

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What struck me in the Lent Course was how often this experience of crucifixion, waiting and resurrection happens in our lives, and that we must embrace this experience as part of the normal Christian life, rather than see troubles and difficulties as enemies. Grieving and letting go are a normal and natural part of life, and they are the key to our growth. Jesus said. **“I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)**

Let us therefore use this time of Lent, Holy Week and Easter to trust in the promise of resurrection now, but recognising that to get there we may have to let some things go, and even experience a time of crucifixion and waiting in order to get to the place where we can fully receive the new life that Jesus promises us.

The collect for the third Sunday of lent has always been a favourite of mine and sums up what I have been trying to say here:

**Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen**

In Christian love

Paul