

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

As we draw towards the end of Lent we move from a sombre examination of *life at a distance from God*, to reflect on the Passion of Christ ... His suffering and death and resurrection. Today, we move out of a cycle of readings from one of the Synoptic gospels into the gospel of John; written perhaps 40-50 years after the others and after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. John writes more of a theological background *about* the Good News of Jesus; *making sense of* the other narratives if you like ... *"in the light of recent events."*

Today is Passion Sunday and our story opens with some 'Greeks' coming to Philip asking to 'see' Jesus. By 'see' it is most likely that 'looking for a reason to believe' is a more accurate description of what they came to do. The word used for Greeks isn't one to describe natives of the region we know as Greece, nor is it one used to describe those expat Jews living in the wider world outside the Holy Land who speak Greek as a first language. The word used describes Gentiles living among the Jews who, because they are in Jerusalem during the preparations for the Passover can reasonably be assumed to be in the process of conversion to Judaism ... in other words they are foreigners, but they are also seekers after the Truth.

These foreigners come to Philip asking him to take them to see Jesus. Why Philip? Well, he looks like one of them and he has a Greek name. Philip, Andrew and Peter came from Bethsaida and therefore in one sense are recognised as *Greek*. These men therefore sought the assistance of one of their own to get them a little closer to this man who only last week ... *raised Lazarus from the dead!*

Jesus however, responds in the oblique. Instead of answering their question,

He turns to Andrew and Philip: *"the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!"* On four previous occasions in John's gospel (in chapter 2, twice in chapter 7, and again in chapter 8) we're told that *"My hour has not yet come"* or words to that effect? So what's changed?

Perhaps the arrival of these foreigners indicates to Jesus that the long game has started to achieve its objective. He starts to explain, but ironically, in ways that we can't understand, unless we know how it plays out in the end:

- unless a grain of wheat falls ... and dies ... it remains a single grain
- those who love their life lose it ... those who hate their life in this world will keep it
- whoever serves Me must follow Me, and where I am, there must My servant be also.

But despite all this talk of death and hate and service, Jesus stays on point ... He makes it clear that this is part of the plan! The human Jesus might naturally feel a degree of angst as He leaves behind the comforts of the familiar ... but God's will must be done ... *it is for this that I have come!*

The reading from Hebrews lays it out clearly for us too; in His human life *Jesus offered up prayers and supplication with loud cries and tears ... and was heard because of His reverent submission ... He learned obedience through what He suffered.* What did Jesus suffer? We can sometimes forget in this season of Passion that Jesus' suffering commenced long before His betrayal and His crucifixion ... we sometimes forget that Jesus' apprenticeship started before the beginning of the world. Jesus has been, and will continue to be *present to* all our sin and all our neglect/abuse of all God's creation

throughout all time. If that's not enough to cause His suffering, I don't know what is.

But as always, it's the *hope* of the eternal kingdom that is the abiding message of Scripture. The prophet Jeremiah brings us the foundational principle behind that idea of hope: "*the days are surely coming ... when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah ... I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; ... I will be their God and they will be my people ... from the least of them to the greatest ... I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.*"

When we read this in our 21st century context we need to remember that *the house of Israel and the house of Judah* refer to the reunited kingdoms, *ALL* the chosen children of God ... *all those who believe!* That's you and me ... Anglicans, Romans, Methodists and Baptists and all the rest of us who recognise and follow our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Our message today, in Lent and in every other season of life therefore, is that the hope of Jesus Christ is *a certainty not a dream!* We had a note from Felicity and Aubrey Whitcombe a few days ago ... expressing their thanks for our support following the death of their daughter Rosa-Jane. Felicity makes this same point ... it is *CERTAINTY* that is the foundational bedrock of *HOPE* which sustains us in times of crisis ... not a dream or a passing wish that it might.

Claim that certainty! Lock it in! Hope is contagious! Those around us can't help but be infected. Be that voice of hope for others ... whether they are actually in crisis, or perhaps just think that they might be. Smile. Listen. Agree with what you can. Make a cup of tea and pray ... sometimes using words.

Amen.