

Readings for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

3rd September 2023

First Reading: Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 'And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you."' God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you": This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations. '

Second Reading: Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Gospel: St Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

A Reflection for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

From Rev'd David Higgon

Let Justice and Peace Flow

The theme for this year's Season of Creation is 'Let Justice and Peace Flow'. They are words from the prophet Amos who said ... Let justice roll on like a river.

The burn, *Allt na Char*, that flows next to my house is a source of much delight to me, but it is also a constant cause of anxiety because I rely on it for my water supply, and that supply can be very erratic. Earlier this year for the first time in 17 years it dried up completely, but in winter the pipes that carry the water are often washed out by the force of the burn in full spate.

In terms of the effects of climate change for millions of people around the world, my anxieties are trivial and miniscule. Millions are suffering, through floods and droughts and severe weather caused in part by the effects of global warming that is a result of our use of fossil fuels.

The prophet Amos reminds us that we as human beings and all living things, plants and animals, can only flourish where there is an adequate supply of water. Importantly, Amos also tells us that in the same way that all life needs water to flourish, human life only flourishes where there is justice and righteousness

Unfortunately, justice for God's creation is running dry. Biodiversity is being lost at a rate not seen since the last mass extinction. The futures of young people are threatened by the cascading impacts of the loss of biodiversity and a changing climate.

The urgency grows for us to make our peace with our planet and justice calls us to repentance and a change of attitude and actions. If we can join the river of justice and peace with others, then hope is created instead of despair.

Every day we are presented by more and more evidence of extreme weather across the globe, but like Peter, in our Gospel reading today, we are reluctant to face the reality of what the future holds, we keep telling ourselves that the worse effects of climate change will never happen to us, despite all the evidence to the contrary and the warnings of scientists across the world.

We are facing a moral dilemma in that we are reluctant to give up what we consider to be the benefits of our current way of life, even if they prove to be fatal to everything that our lives depend on. And as increases in the cost of living add yet another reason why we should postpone difficult choices about how we live; our governments are under pressure to postpone action on climate change even when we know that those changes that we have to make become more difficult with postponement.

Jesus's announcement of the prospect of the cross insists that such things are far from trivial, and he is severe in his rebuke of Peter who wants life to continue as before. He wants to avoid the truth that Jesus confronts him with.

Jesus said to Peter 'Get behind me, Satan!' - this is a stinging rebuke – Peter, 'the rock', is treated as a personification of evil.

But delve deeper. 'Get behind me' is the same verb used elsewhere for 'follow'. This is not just a rebuke; it is also a call to follow the path of Jesus – rather than the way of the world.

After his altercation with Peter, Jesus spells it out that to follow him we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. Peter is not seen by Jesus as some sort of demon. Peter simply just does not 'get' the seriousness of the path Jesus is called to take, and what his well-meaning discouragement will cost in the long run. How many seemingly prudent arguments have you heard lately suggesting we postpone action on climate change. It seems like every week someone from the major oil and gas companies tell us that anything that reduces investment in new gas or oil production is dangerous and irresponsible, despite all what science tells us is happening to our world.

What does it really mean to deny ourselves and to take up our cross? Following the way of the cross is an invitation to a way of life that is committed to telling the truth and to be truthful to ourselves, to deny ourselves is to cast off the false consciousness that we construct in telling ourselves that the worse effect of climate change will never happen to us. It is a false consciousness that focuses solely only on protecting our own needs and that excludes the cry of the 'other.' To 'deny ourselves', doesn't mean denying the self that God gave us, but rather to renounce 'self' as a priority, freeing us to be a blessing to others and ourselves.

Paul, In his letter to the Romans, tells us in a very straight forward and practical way how we take up our cross through the love and care we show for each other, for strangers and even our enemies, but not to forget our own needs, but to care for one another's wounds, to act as healers, as peace builders in one another's lives; to care for God's good creation, and to love our neighbour and our enemy..

In Jesus we have a divine companion who calls us to follow him and who offers hope to all. As we face the current predicament our voices can be a glimmer of hope for others, for those for whom it is difficult to speak truth to power, they are often the poorest people of our world, who are already feeling the worst effects of climate change; they are also all living things, the plants and animals facing environmental catastrophe but who have no voice, and they are the generations yet to born who will have to live with the legacy we are creating for them today.

It is not just for ourselves that we should follow Jesus, but it is for those whose voices cannot be heard that our voices can at least be a glimmer of hope in times of anxiety and uncertainty.