

WORSHIP FOR EARLSDON on 28 February 2021

Call to Worship:

“Hear my people, I am the Lord your God. You must have no other gods before me”

Hymn SF 455 : All my hope on God is founded

Prayer:

Lord God,

**We come before you,
And desire that our lives to be like an open book.
Come write your story of love across every page**

**We trust that with you we will always see the way ahead,
May our every move be at one with your will.**

**We know that you protect us, and keep us as we travel.
Come reveal to us all that we need to see along the way,
As we journey on this incredible adventure with you.**

Amen.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

New Testament Reading: Mark 8: 31-38

Reflection.

Some of you may remember the paper sculptures that Valerie Bennett and a group of clever people made for the circuit. They made Jesus and the Devil for Lent and put them in the garden of Macdonald Road church for passers-by to see. The trouble was when the wind blew they did not stay fixed . Valerie and Michael regularly received phone calls from a friendly neighbour to say that Jesus and the Devil were wrestling again in the middle of Macdonald Road and stopping the traffic. Whenever Lent comes round and the thought of Jesus in conflict with the Devil is mentioned, that is the image that instantly comes to my mind.

But today's reading reminds us that it is not as simple as that. Yes, Jesus is rejecting Satan. But the Devil is not the obvious figure of evil. The one he tells to get behind him (as he did in the desert) is not the Devil but his best friend, his chosen leader of the disciples, Peter himself. Peter on whom the church is going to be built. Jesus calls Peter Satan. What on earth is that about?

A few years ago I went to York to see a performance of the Mystery Plays dramatizing Bible stories. It depicted a story rarely thought about. Jesus is on trial before Pontius Pilate and the message comes from Pilate's wife to tell him that he must release Jesus. Utterly straightforward. Pilate's wife was obviously a good woman, kind, loving and just. But in that performance we see her having that dream and it is the Devil, Satan who is whispering in her ear. We were so bemused by why that should be that we had to talk about it on the way home. Then it dawned on us - if Pilate had released Jesus then he would not have gone to the cross. God's appointed way of reconciling the world, forgiving people's sins, making atonement call it what you will....it would not have happened. And the Devil would have been victorious.

So it is with Peter. He's not doing this because he is evil. Far from it. He doesn't want Jesus to go the way of sacrifice and death because he loves him so much. It is his love, his kindness which

makes him say what he does. But it is wrong and is the very temptation that Jesus must resist as steadfastly as he did in the wilderness.

We who are followers of Jesus, who genuinely love him need to be careful lest we fall into the same trap. We might get in the way of his will and we might do it precisely because we don't want him – or ourselves or the church, his body – to go the way of being broken. That's why Lent is not simply about taking the side of Jesus against Satan. That's easy. We are good people. We know which side we are on. No, Lent is more profound than that, more rigorous in its searching self examination. Are we sure that the things we are doing, the choices we are making, the direction we are taking as church, as individually as sincerely committed Christians are God's will?. Or are they our own will which we expect God to fit in with?

Peter did learn. But he learned by being broken, by becoming a splintered rock totally dependent on the forgiveness of Jesus. He had displayed sincere love for Jesus and he had displayed his weakness when he was asked to show sacrificial love. He had failed in different ways but he was forgiven. And he learned to follow Jesus he learned to get behind Jesus and follow him rather than making his own decisions, he learned not to lead Jesus even with the best of intentions. And on that broken rock the church of Christ was founded and flourished.

Hymn: 462: Come with me

Prayer **Remind us often Lord, when we are feeling proud, self-satisfied beyond reproach, pleased with ourselves, self sufficient in our ways, that for such as us you walked a road that took you to a cruel cross, and rose again to show us where we might look for rescue when we fall from this lofty perch** **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 687: One human family God has made

Blessing Prayer: May you be a blessing to every life you touch,
and the Spirit within, that life-giving water,
be a gift of refreshment in love shown and shared
with all who are thirsty along the road you travel.

Closing Music for reflection: All I once held dear, built my life upon

