

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

