

Dreghorn and Springside Parish Church

Sunday 30th August 2020

Bible Reading

Matthew 16.21-28

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life."

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "God forbid it, Lord!" he said. "That must never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned around and said to Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from human nature."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it. ²⁶ Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! There is nothing you can give to regain your life. ²⁷ For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his deeds. ²⁸ I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Son of Man come as King."

Sermon 'Pick up your cross and follow me'

The great artist and inventor Leonardo Da Vinci was a dab hand at working with a mirror. In fact, he frequently used mirror writing for his notes. Mirror writing is writing in the opposite direction from normal, so that when you look at what you've written in the mirror it looks like it's the right way round. If you haven't tried yet give it a go, it gets your brain all muddled up but it's probably good for you.

So often it seems that's the way God works, the opposite way round. We think that power and influence, might and manipulation are the ways to overcome and win, but God shows us a different way. It was in his own self giving that Jesus defeated death forever. And he called his followers to lose ourselves that we find our true selves. This all seems absolute nonsense to the world, but followers of Jesus, have time and time again found this to be true.

Some think Leonardo Da Vinci practiced mirror writing because he was trying to make it harder for people to read his notes and steal his ideas. Or maybe it was because he was sometimes seen with a brush or a quill in his left-hand, and if you're left-handed like me, you'll know that writing left handed can be a messy business as the ink gets all smudged. Or some think that maybe Leonardo used mirror writing to hide his scientific ideas from the church, who sometimes disagreed with his ground-breaking work.

Last week in our Bible reading, Peter got it. He really got it. Peter correctly identified Jesus as 'the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And in this profound statement the Church was born. The Church that resisted change, just as Leonardo found, the Church that thinks it knows best. Better than even Jesus.

Peter uses human logic, he might well have expected that Jesus, now revealed for his true self, would form a War Council, plan a strategy, march on Jerusalem forming an army as he went, overthrow the powers and authorities and then be installed as the true King of kings and Lord of lords. 'Thy Kingdom come' through might, influence and power. It is really hard to resist that glorious temptation.

But Jesus does the very opposite. From that time on Jesus turns their whole world upside down and the other way round. He explains that he would not be welcomed but rather he would be rejected, that he would not be crowned but he would be executed, not empowered by might but weakened by affliction. And that God's Kingdom would not come in glorious battle but in heart rending sacrifice. Jesus will go to Jerusalem, but he will suffer, he will be killed and three days later he will rise again.

Peter chastises him for spouting such nonsense and here we see the solid rock on which the church will stand, contorts just as quickly into a stumbling block that threatens to obstruct God's mission.

Peter who just five minutes before gets it so right, now gets it so wrong. He protests. "God forbid it, Lord! That must never happen to you!" And Jesus' response is swift and to the point: "Get away from me, Satan!"

The similarity to Jesus' command to Satan in the wilderness, told at Matthew chapter 4 is clear. There, when the Satan is tempting Jesus, Jesus says "Go away, Satan!"

Satan had dared Jesus to use his authority as the Son of God for his own purposes instead of serving God's mission in the world. Satan had tempted Jesus to set his mind on human things rather than on the things of God.

Jesus refused. Instead of hoarding bread made from stones to relieve his own empty stomach, he fed the hungry masses. Instead of claiming the privileges of Sonship to call on God's angels for his own benefit, he used his privilege to save, to heal, and to restore the lives of the sick and the marginalised. Instead of grasping after worldly varieties of power and authority, he opened the kingdom of heaven to all who would follow him.

Jesus refused to fall into Satan's trap and be diverted from God's mission. He showed the falsehood of the world's measures of authority. And on the way, he revealed the topsy-turvy way of what it looks like to serve God's way.

So, Jesus' response to Peter is an echo of his earlier rejection of the Devil. Jesus refuses to avoid the journey that lies ahead, despite the fact that pointless suffering, caused by human sin and violence toward an innocent one, will appear to win. It is necessary for him to go to Jerusalem. Why? Because "on the third day he will be raised to life". God will disempower violence as the ultimate power, he will turn the world's ways the other way around and prove that his ways are even stronger than death itself.

This way of God, just like mirror writing really gets your brain working differently. Turns your world around and back to front, or maybe that's better put as, turns our world the right way round at last. Reimagining the world from God's perspective is challenging, it difficult to comprehend, even harder to live, but it is the way to new life.

Jesus says, 'If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross and follow me'. This is a call, like a church bell that rings on down through the centuries and calling us from whatever we are doing today. So, imagine its sound ringing through shops, and clubs and church buildings. Imagine its sound ringing through classrooms, and hospital wards, housing estates and lonely

homes: pick up your cross and follow me. Imagine coming to your door to see where the noise is coming from and see there walking ahead in your street is Jesus, a compelling, a mysterious figure, calling 'pick up your cross and follow me'.

Following Jesus will both cost you everything and give you everything. He calls for no half measures on this journey. It's like learning to swim: if you keep one foot on the bottom of the pool, you'll never work out how it's done. You have to lose your life to find it. What's the use of keeping your feet on the bottom when the water gets too deep? You have the choice sink or swim. You have to let go of your safety, that foot on the bottom, in order to become more.

Jesus said to his followers, that some of them would not taste death until they saw him as King. And three days later following his own death, he did this very thing. He overcame evil, he overcame death and he rose again, King over life and King over death.

These are hard things Jesus asked of his followers, few of us really enter into the living of them. But in every generation, there seems to be a few people, who dare to take Jesus seriously at his word. What would it be like if you were to be one of them? Amen.

Jamie Milliken
30th August 2020