

12th Sunday after Trinity Sunday 30 August 2020

Collect

God of constant mercy who sent your Son to save us:
Remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us,
That our thankfulness may grow, through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen

Readings

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.

Romans 12: 9- end

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.

Matthew 16: 21- end

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.'

Reflection

The gospel reading focusses this weekend on what, for many, is a big stumbling block in the Christian faith, and that is the relationship of faith and suffering. Today's passage makes it very plain that, far from promising a problem-free life, there is a cost to following Jesus. It offers us evidence of Peter's struggle to grasp the connection between following Christ and suffering. But it also shows us that we can be encouraged by Jesus promise to reward us for any suffering in due course (but probably in the next world and not this one!), and that he understands everything that we go through, because he too suffered.

Whenever we are worried that we are not up to this challenge, we can look to Peter. Whenever we fail, we can look to Peter. He failed frequently and lacked courage often, yet he went on to be a great church leader, despite his weaknesses.

We know that Peter was held captive somewhere and died for his faith. Despite all he suffered, however, he was not a naturally brave man. The Bible famously describes him denying Christ repeatedly because he was afraid that he would be arrested like his master. In last week's reading, we heard how Peter received high praise from Jesus because he recognised him to be the Messiah, the long-awaited deliverer. Jesus declared that Peter could only have received this revelation from God and that he would become the rock that the Church would be built upon.

Yet in a short space of time Peter went from being praised by Jesus to being rebuked and called Satan. Peter may have realised that Jesus was the Messiah, but he had misunderstood what kind of messiah he was. Like others of his time, he expected their deliverer to vanquish Israel's Roman oppressors, not be tried, tortured and die at their hands. Jesus' talk of a suffering messiah shocked and angered Peter and even provoked him to take Christ aside and reprimand him. Jesus, of course, rebuked him back. In his eyes, Peter was acting like Satan because he was tempting him to follow an easier path. Jesus knew that he had to suffer and die in order to bring salvation to the world. Christ also warned Peter and the other disciples that those who followed him would also suffer like him. However, he encouraged them that, despite the heavy cost, following him was worth it and they would be rewarded on his return for all they had gone through.

God knows we are not naturally strong, and that we lack courage. What matters is our willingness to serve the Lord. For, as Peter's life shows, God will help us with the rest. This is a hard message to hear, and harder to live out, but if God can give Peter, who often lacked bravery, the courage he needed to take up his cross, then God can help us too.