

Sunday 3rd September 2023 trinity 13; Benefice BCP HC
Stonegrave

How many of you here remember the pop group T. Rex? Maybe you don't want to own up to being part of that glam rock era!

Well, one of Marc Bolan's lesser-known songs was called, 'Life's an elevator' - to which the refrain was, 'life goes up and down'.

If there has ever been one person who epitomises this state of things it was St Peter. Our Gospel reading today follows immediately on his confession of Jesus as the Christ. Jesus told the disciples in verse 20 to keep that secret for now but what he did not want to keep secret was his own understanding of what being the Christ involved, and the chief thing Christ-ship involved was suffering and death. That is why, as verse 21 tells us, Jesus talked about these grim topics "from that time on." But, of course, it didn't sit well with the politically minded disciples, starting with the one who had just made the good confession—and whom Jesus had just blessed mightily for having done so—namely, Peter himself. Within the span of only a few minutes, Peter went from "the Blessed rock" or 'Makarios' to "Satan the Scandal"! The change-of-status happens when Peter, takes it on himself to give Jesus a little lesson in theology. Peter quietly but sternly tells Jesus, "God forbid this should ever happen to you, Lord!". Jesus responds by calling Peter a *skandalon*, a scandal, which in Greek refers to a rock over which a person stumbles. Simon is still getting depicted in rock-like terms, but this time he's not a foundation stone but a trip-hazard! Then, just to be sure Peter, and now all of us, gets the point as to what makes the difference between being a useful building block or a dangerous stumbling

block, Jesus launches into his famous words about bearing the cross. Here is the great paradox of the Christian faith, the cross, and our ability to let our everyday life be shaped by that it, is what makes the difference in our lives and in the world. But that means that the thing that even hell itself cannot touch is not something powerful the way the world reckons such things but something *weak*. It's weakness that hell cannot attack. It is vulnerability and the gospel way of suffering servanthood and gentle love that the devil and his hosts cannot exploit, because it is in weakness and vulnerability that God's love shines through the strongest. As Julian of Norwich said, "*...we need to fall, and we need to be aware of it; for if we did not fall, we should not know how weak and wretched we are of ourselves, nor should we know our Maker's marvellous love so fully...*"

The walk is a precarious one, and if nothing else, this is a clear indication that a believer can be walking with God one moment and walking in darkness the next, moving like Peter in a moment from blessed to scandal. Believers must be ever vigilant to walk in the light, as He is the light, and he seeks to lead us and carry us in His light.

Have you ever been on the highest spiritual high and immediately fall to the lowest low? It happens so, we can certainly relate to Peter today. He was just coming off receiving grand kudos from Jesus over his correct confession of Christ and now - perhaps smug and confident of himself and of his knowledge - he not only seeks to correct but begins to rebuke the Lord Jesus' prophetic statements over what was certain to occur. How often do we too think we can assume the thinking of God and proceed to tell Him what He should be doing or seek to dictate to others what their lives should be like or how they should live? It is very easy to fall into the wrong

thought pattern of presumption that if we understand one thing in spiritual matters, we comprehend all things. We cannot, only God can, only He has the big picture. Human pride makes us think otherwise and causes to make judgements about people or situations which are simply wrong. Pride or self-righteousness can be insidious, and Satan constantly seeks for that, especially when we think ourselves very sure of ourselves.

How do we protect ourselves? We pray and offer our vulnerability to God for Him to transform us. We live out our lives according to the long list provided by St Paul in his letter to the Romans; hold fast to what is good, love one another, in ardent service, rejoice in hope, persevere in prayer, live in harmony, share in rejoicing and weeping and seek to live in community with humility and honesty.

Above all keep the Cross of Jesus ever before us, as we carry our own. Thanks be to God. Amen.