

Sunday 17th March 2024; 5th Sunday of Lent; Benefice Holy Communion, Oswaldkirk

Today marks the start of Passiontide, the time when we begin the final stages of our journey in Lent, with Jesus, towards the foot of the cross. Perhaps now, more than at any other time we see Jesus as fully human, the “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief”. We also see him as a man of extraordinary strength and courage as he struggles to face what lies ahead. He doesn’t look for suffering, but he faces it in the full knowledge of what it will involve. He knows he will suffer all the misery, hurt and humiliation we can inflict on each other, to be scorned, rejected, and hated.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews gives us a picture of Jesus praying, ‘with loud cries and tears’ to be saved from death. Most of us can probably recognize a little of that fear of something which is about to happen to us. So, when we suffer in body, mind, or spirit we find, in Jesus, a God who has intimate knowledge of our pain and grief and like no other, enters into the pain and suffering of this world, such is His love for it, and us.

When Jesus commits himself to the road that leads to the cross, he commits himself to identifying fully with the pain and suffering of this world, with His Father. “It is for this reason I’ve come to this hour. Father, glorify your name”. That’s when God’s voice is heard saying “I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again”.

The irony of this would be that by entering into this suffering completely, and thereby making a new covenant between God and his people God too would suffer, because it would mean that his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, would have to die and suffer the pains of human death.

Jesus would bear the sins of the people so that they could be forgiven and saved.

Jesus therefore makes his choice and faces the cross. So, we, too, must make choices about how we live this Passiontide.

We can choose to walk with Jesus part of the way. We can come here on Palm Sunday and sing Hosanna, or on Easter Day and sing Alleluia. But maybe we choose not to come on Good Friday and say, “Crucify him” and hear “Why have you forsaken me?”. But that’s not how the full story goes because we’d be missing the mystery at the heart of our faith, that God’s love does not fail, even on the cross, even towards those who chose to crucify him. The other choice is to walk alongside Jesus for the whole journey accompanying each during Holy Week. By doing that, we can enter into his story, knowing that it’s our story too.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and during the following Holy week, I therefore invite you to come to as many of the services as you can especially the Thursday, Friday, Saturday and of course Sunday because in order to enter into the full joy of resurrection then we will also have to enter into the full agony of Gethsemane and Golgotha. God’s glory is in the living, suffering and dying of Jesus but that’s not the end of the story. God’s glory is in the raising of Jesus to new life, the final triumph of love over death. So this Passiontide let’s enter fully into the mystery of the suffering of Jesus so that we can also enter fully in the joy of his resurrection.