

Sunday 15th September 2024, Trinity 16. Benefice Holy Communion, Oswaldkirk

The phrase “It is what it is...” is something we seem to hear a lot these days. It expresses in many cases a sense of resignation to a situation you wouldn’t particularly choose. The next state from that is disillusion. Are you disillusioned? The word is defined as, the ‘disappointment resulting from the discovery that something is not as good as one believed it to be.’ We often hear the comment, “enthusiasm soon turned into disillusion”.

Disillusion seems to be everywhere. Perhaps it’s a common disease from which we all suffer. There is disillusionment with our leaders and the political system, economic opportunities, endless wars and violence, prejudice, and oppression, with religion and the church. Every one of us could tell a story about being disillusioned, the personal disillusion that is unique and particular to our circumstances when you feel that life isn’t what you thought it was and may never be.

Disillusion happens when the story we’ve told ourselves, the story on which we based our lives and beliefs, to which we committed ourselves, no longer makes sense, is no longer relevant, or no longer works. Disillusionment is an in between time, a time when we have lost faith in the old familiar story but have not yet embraced another story. It leaves us panicked and fearful about the future and makes the world seem like a dangerous and chaotic place, because we have lost control.

Disillusionment, however, isn’t only about what’s going on around us. It’s also an internal spiritual issue and one we see in Peter in today’s gospel. He is a picture of disillusionment. He confessed Jesus as the Messiah, but he has his own view about who the Messiah is and what he should do. Who doesn’t? Jesus, however, is about to turn

Peter's enthusiasm to disillusion, to undo and rewrite his story. "The Son of Man," he says, "must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." So much for Peter's understanding of the Messiah. That's neither what he expected nor what he wanted so he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him, as if he knows more and better than Jesus. In Matthews Gospel he says, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you". You can hear Peter's disillusionment. He confesses one minute and rebukes the next, all with the same tongue in the same conversation. He's speaking with a forked tongue, or out of both sides of his mouth. It's what James is describing in today's epistle. If you listen to the disillusionment in your own life or in the life of another you will probably hear blessing and cursing coming from the same mouth. "With the tongue", James says, "we bless the Lord and Father, and we curse those who are made in the likeness of God."

The forked tongue is a symptom of division within us. It reveals our panicked disillusionment, and our arrogance, that we know exactly where things are going and what should be done. Peter's enthusiastic confession has been replaced by an arrogant and disillusioned rebuke showing that panicked disillusionment can quickly lead to arrogant self-assertion. But Jesus has no time for Peter's arrogant self-assertion. "Get behind me, Satan," he says. Like in the wilderness, Jesus hears Peter's rebuke as a temptation to be less than who he is and as a distraction from his mission. Maybe that's true for us too. Disillusion tempts us to be less than who we truly are, to be arrogant and self-assertive, to lose sight of our calling. In our disillusionment we often put our story in front of God's story, give more credence to what we see rather than what God sees, and take our story to be more real than God's story. Isn't that what's going on in the conflicts we have with another, in the times we assert ourselves and feud

with each another, in our words and actions of violence? In our panicked disillusion and arrogance, we can easily and quickly betray ourselves, each other, and God's new story.

Jesus tells Peter (and us) that He is the new story to live by, but it's a story of self-denial, about taking up a cross and following him. It's not just a story that Jesus tells, it's the story he is called to, and lives and he says that if any want to become his followers they must know and live that story too.

What if then, just maybe, self-denial is about separating from that which we often use to define ourselves and each other; political parties, national identity, economic status, family, even being religious and defining ourselves or others as Christian? What if it is about redefining ourselves, our priorities, and our beliefs to be more in line with those of Jesus, knowing Him, following Him, being like Him, doing as He did? What if self-denial is the key to loving our enemy as our neighbour, making a place for others, and recognizing that their lives are as sacred as ours? Maybe, just maybe, self-denial is the answer to disillusion and what allows us to truly be alive.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

