

MARK 8:31-38

Lent can be one of the most reflective beautiful seasons of the church year I say that because held within it is a deep rooted message of hope.

I was therefore hoping that the lectionary would give me something positive to reflect on this week.. So, I shuffled off to the study and in great anticipation looked at today's Gospel reading, and what did I get?

Jesus calls Peter one of his best buddies "*Satan*" and then says that we must *deny ourselves and take up a cross, that instrument of painful death and suffering to follow him!* Well with Lenten readings like that I wouldn't be surprised if I don't see some of you again ever again!

But fear not! Today's gospel might be challenging but it's definitely not without that Lenten hope we have been focusing on.

This story follows Jesus asking his disciples *who people say he is*; and then he asks them, "*Who do you say I am?*"

What I love about this story is dear sweet Peter, the disciple who always gets things wrong and sticks his foot in it. However today seems to be Peter's shining moment and he proudly announces "You are the Messiah!"

Then in that moment just when Peter must have felt some long awaited joy that he's finally got something right. Jesus tells him about the suffering, rejection and ultimate death that as the Messiah he must now go through.

What a roller coaster for the poor disciples! They left their families, their businesses and their homes to follow this guy, and just as it's confirmed that they've bet on the right horse. And that he IS the promised saviour king! Jesus IS the Messiah! Their joy gets stomped on from a great height.

Jesus talks about himself in a way they were not expecting and definitely don't want to hear. The disciples are confronted with suffering, rejection, and execution. I can only imagine that a sudden hush must have descended on them all as they stared in disbelief at Jesus as they tried to take in what he was saying!

Can any of us imagine how it must have felt for those words to fall from the lips of the person you love most in the whole world? That they were choosing to die. For you. So you could live. These words must surely have shocked Peter to the core and broken his heart.

If we picture the story like this perhaps we can forgive Peter for missing the *rising from the dead after-three-days resurrection* bit of what Jesus was saying and for reacting in the way he did.

The trouble here is not that Peter is just upset by Jesus' words but that Peter in his usual bumbling way misses the point again completely. If Jesus didn't achieve what he had come to earth to do, then divine love would fail and we would all have been doomed! Jesus Knew this.

What would it have meant for the world if Jesus had turned around in response to Peter and said, *oh ok lets not go through the suffering the rejection and the dying for you*, where would any of us be then?

In some of our recent prayers, we talked about how Jesus was *“tempted in every way as we are, yet did not sin.”* And here we see this being played out before us in the flesh; Jesus rejects this ‘temptation’ from Peter, just as he rejected the temptations in the desert.

So, what does Jesus mean when he cries out at Peter *“Get behind me, Satan!”* is he actually seeing Peter being used by evil. Of course I cannot say for sure what Jesus saw but as I thought about it this week what kept coming into my mind was this:

That all Jesus was and is; and all that he did and does today, is only ever motivated by one thing, love.

So the *“Get behind me, Satan”* is perhaps Jesus telling the world that nothing was going to tempt him to stray from the path of sacrificial love that he knew would ultimately lead to eternal life for you and for me.

I picture Jesus looking at his bumbling confused friend and as he is saying, *Peter get behind me trust me have faith in the plan!*

It’s like Jesus’ words are acting as reminder of that moment when Peter did trust him at the beginning and accepted the invitation to follow despite not knowing what a life with Christ meant or what the cost might be for Jesus or any of them.

None of us truly knows where our lives with God will take us. And just as Peter struggled with the revelation that even the messiah was going to go through the mill. We too will encounter times of wilderness and lack of faith as we deal with the reality’s life and a daily walk of faith that is not all sunshine and glory either.

This Lenten Gospel story then reminds us that we are called as Christians to trust Jesus to hold us even when we like Peter don’t understand what God is doing and when things seem to be going wrong.

Times have been tough over the past year, some of us are grieving, many of us are feeling worn and tired, and many of us are in desperate need of a jolly good hug. So it’s a good thing that we have been given this gospel to challenge us today.

For in it we are being called again to cling to Christ and his promises.

To cling again to the truth. Even we find ourselves struggling in those inevitable moments of absolute darkness and searing pain, that’s what faith is about. To trust and believe even when it doesn’t make sense to the world to do so.

Today and in this second week of Lent we are being called afresh to trust that Jesus is at the centre of our struggling, to stand firm in the knowledge that our God always keeps his

promises to walk with and uphold us in our need. He is always here and there's nothing Satan or anyone else can do about it.

May we all then listen again to Jesus and take his words with us into the days ahead.

*Get behind and Follow me..* though there is a cross to bear right now, remember the cross is my symbol of love, nothing was going to stop me getting to the cross for you then, and just as I held you in my mind's eye and my bleeding heart on that tree, I'm holding you in the same way right now so you do not have to bare your cross alone. I am with you.

So as we continue on our Lenten pilgrimage this week, whatever the world throws at us may we all be ever more attentive to Jesus' whispers as he invites us to remain faithful to and trust fully in him. For with him there is light, there is love, and very soon there will be much celebration as we rediscover our Easter hope too. Amen.