

Sermon written for Palm Sunday 5th April 2020

All Saints Church, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead

Text Philippians 2.5-11 and Matthew 21.1-11

Towards the beginning of Lent Matthew Firth shared with us what would prove to be our one and only evening of the Lent Art course together. So much has happened since with the pandemic called COVID 19 that this delightful evening spent with half a dozen other folk from All Saints, feels to me an age ago.

One of the two paintings Matthew shared with us was 'The Agony in the Garden' by Giovanni Bellini (c.1430-1516). The painting shows Jesus kneeling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, looking forward towards an angel who is holding a chalice and paten. The painting depicts too, the three disciples, Peter, James and John fast asleep while Jesus is in prayer. In the background is the cross.

Matthew invited comments from the group. Julia Wakeling, asked, 'is the rather feeble fence that circles the Praying Christ, the crown of thorns?' We do not have a definitive answer to the question but Julia your response will do for me.

You see today we are asked to look at what type of Saviour was Christ? On Palm Sunday the people see the Messiah who has come. They wanted (The Disciples certainly wanted – who had argued who was the greatest in Mark ch9. 30-37) a conquering monarch, a military leader, not a peacemaker riding on a donkey. By the choice of the donkey, Jesus is not associating himself with kings and generals riding horses and chariots. This is the Saviour whom as St Paul tells us 'emptied himself...humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross.'

Using our Lent book, 'Walking The Way Of The Cross' by Stephen Cottrell, Paula Gooder and Philip North, on station one in the Garden of Gethsemane, Cottrell says, I was used to Jesus when he was strong, turning over tables, casting out demons, clever with speech...' 'I want his stories to be true, of hope and forgiveness and of a God that loves me.' So do I Bishop Stephen, so do the people of All Saints and the whole of Christendom. You speak for us all. Stephen continues 'It isn't easy for Jesus to be weak and scared and lacking sleep' as Bellini and the gospel depict and describe him.

Moving to Station 4 of the above- mentioned book we find at Station 4, Peter denying Jesus. Cottrell uses the text 'I do not know this man'. 'Peter got this right for once' 'He didn't know him. Of course, none of us really want to know him this way. We thought he would be our all -powerful Superman. After all he said he would tear down the temple and rebuild in three days. Now on seeing the Jesus as the humble suffering servant we feel stupid, vulnerable, desolate. We feel alongside the World at this point in history, facing this cruel virus very scared. Back to Cottrell, 'I keep thinking, that something else will make sense out of this senselessness.'

How many people in our world today are feeling vulnerable? The nurses and Doctors and carers of the NHS, people working long hours at the superstores, people ill in hospital or at home, those people worried about elderly loved ones isolated, those worried about their livelihoods. Let's be honest most of us are asking the questions of Peter now? Humanity is vulnerable.

This is Palm Sunday. We move together (Probably isolated at home but together in spirit) to experience Jesus sharing the Last Supper the meal that points to the gift of New Life of Heavenly food. We see Jesus washing feet and challenging us to join him as servant people. We see the cross

and believe that Jesus' sacrifice will lead to the act that 'something else will make sense out of senselessness'. Yes, Jesus' sacrifice will lead to new and transformed life. On Holy Saturday we remember the prophets pointing to the Saviour to come, the one who will breathe new life into his people. We will visualise the Easter Fire and live spirit filled lives overcoming our fears to take on the challenge to love God and our neighbours. We will visualise the Paschal Candle alight from the fire entering the darkened church of All Saints. We will sing in our hearts 'The Light of Christ' Thanks be to God. We will know that this light, overcomes darkness and fears, that this light of goodness and mercy overcomes evil and this light of New Life overcomes death.

With my prayers,

Fr Jeremy