

Lenten Devotionals – 2019

Monday, April 15

Bringer of Justice

Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

"...a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice"

The prophet Nahum spoke for God in Judah in about 625 B.C. His name means 'comfort'. This might seem ironic since Nahum graphically describes the coming destruction of the city of Nineveh. But the book was a source of comfort to the people of Judah. The Assyrians were brutal conquerors. They had violently invaded Judah decades earlier. Now it was their turn to suffer for their crimes.

Isaiah 42, however, brings a new dimension to the justice of God. In Nahum, wrath is a devastating firestorm. In Isaiah the Messiah acts with such precision and care that 'a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench'.

War correspondent, Greg Clarke, describes visiting a village on the coast of recently liberated France in 1944. In one house he encountered a young woman who had been punished for collaborating because her boyfriend had been a young German soldier. The crowd had attacked her in the street and shaved her head. She lay in her darkened room sobbing and disgraced.

Clarke was back in southern France a few years later and asked a friend what had happened to the girl. He smiled and said, "the German boy came back a year later and took her to his home town. They are married now."

Sometimes things are not what we may think. Christ will judge with absolute knowledge and understanding. There is comfort in God's perfect justice.

Tuesday, April 16

My Anchoring Place

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

The Reformer John Knox was on his deathbed someone ask if there was a passage from the Bible that he would like to have read. His response was ‘the place where I first cast my anchor’. There was something about the 17th chapter of John that had led him to put his trust in Christ. It was there he had cast his anchor and bound himself to the Saviour.

This passage from 1 Corinthians had a similar effect on me. A number of acquaintances and friends had made commitments to Christ. I thought they had lost their minds and had ongoing arguments with a number of them. The intellectuals of the world appeared to be united in their conviction that God did not exist. In this modern world how could anyone believe in religion? Especially Christianity?

But they seemed to have something I did not. There was a sense of joy and purpose in them. There was an empty space in my life for which they seemed to have found a solution. I went to one of their Bible studies and came home very confused.

Alone in my room I pulled down an unused New Testament from the bookshelf and opened it at random to 1 Corinthians 1. It talked about how the philosophers were secure in their wisdom but didn’t have a clue. It talked about how the wisdom of the cross seemed like foolishness, but was really the power of God.

That night in secret I told God that (if he was there) I needed him in my life. From that point on things began to come together.

Wednesday, April 17

Is it I, Lord?

Reading: John 13:21-32

“Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.

The Passover was and is primarily a family feast. Other feasts were community or even national events but the Passover was to be observed with one’s family with the youngest person present initiating the observance with the question, “Why is this night different from all other nights?”

But on this Passover, Jesus and his disciples were with one another. As Jesus said on another occasion, “the one who does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” The twelve were his family. That made the fact that one of them would betray him all the more painful.

Yet it was not as though Judas was the obvious villain. They were confused by Jesus words. And apprehensive. Peter would swear fealty and still deny Jesus three times. That was a form of betrayal. All of them would run away when the soldiers appeared in the Garden of Gethsemane. That was a form of betrayal. And some think Judas was actually hoping to force Jesus’ hand and cause him to reveal himself as the Messiah. He was a traitor but may have been a muddled one.

Under what circumstances might any one of us be the betrayer? Does peer pressure cause us to hide our light under a bushel? Does the secularism of our time cause us to feel uncomfortable about being in a minority? Do we demur about taking a moral stand because we don’t want to be seen as a goody-two-shoes?

In Holy Week we stand in fellowship with the Twelve. ‘Is it I, Lord?’

Thursday, April 18

Freed by Faithfulness

Reading: Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

“O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,”

Psalm 116 is a useful selection for Maundy Thursday.

On this night Jesus wrestled in prayer in Gethsemane. The horror of the next day loomed large. He asked the Father to let this cup of suffering pass over him without being tasted. But unlike the children of Israel on the first Passover eve, that was not to be.

At some point in the midst of that great internal struggle, the die was cast. He would follow the plan. He would give his life for the sins of the world. He would not turn aside. He would do absolutely the right thing, the thing God wanted.

In surrendering completely to the will of God there is freedom. *“You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a sacrifice of thanksgiving...I will pay my vows.”*

Some of us may never face this sort of momentous decision. We are fortunate perhaps if such trials never come our way.

But if they do and we are able to battle through to faithfulness, it would appear that there is a new, deeper freedom in obedience. But we can only experience it if we obey.