

Christ the Saviour, Ealing



Spiritual Resources for Lent 2022 *Week V*

Journey's End

*Sunday 3rd April -
Saturday 9th April 2022*

Lent 2022

During Lent we have journeyed together as a community, reflecting on our faith and our commitment to Christ and his Church. As we come to the end of Lent our weekly series of readings, reflections and prayers focus on *The Journey's End* as we recall Our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, the prelude to the solemn events of Holy Week.

Our resources are produced in conjunction with the Parish of St Matthew, Westminster. I am grateful to colleagues for the considerable help given to make this weekly production possible and pray that it may be a blessing to us all as we journey through these holy days.

With my love and prayers,



Gerald Priestland concluded his memorable radio series 'The Case Against God' as follows:

'And so I take my stand upon Holy Island. Among the wind blasted remains of the Priory, where St Aidan and St Cuthbert prayed and where men and women still make their pilgrimage as they have done for fourteen hundred years. Not because of magic or superstition – the faithful aren't idiots – but because when they looked for him, and didn't just argue about him, God was here, and made sense.

But never think you can capture him. Never think you can put up walls and a roof round him, as they tried to do here time and again. Eventually every attempt to imprison him collapses and the gales of God sweep on, past the ruins.'

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
 Bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
 Strong deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
 Songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.

W Williams (1717-1791)

Passion Sunday

April 3rd

Each Sunday in Lent Fr Jonathan Aitken introduces one of the Penitential Psalms. This week he looks at Psalm 102.

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me on the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily on the day when I call. For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my skin. I am like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places. I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop. All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse.

For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink, because of your indignation and anger; for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside. My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, are enthroned for ever; your name endures to all generations. You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favour it; the appointed time has come. For your servants hold its stones dear, and have pity on its dust. The nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth your glory. For the Lord will build up Zion; he will appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer.

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord: that he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die; so that the name of the Lord may be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the Lord.

He has broken my strength in mid-course; he has shortened my days. O my God, I say, 'do not take me away at the mid-point of my life, you whose years endure throughout all generations.'

Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence.

This penitential Psalm (102) should strike many chords at many levels for God's faithful people. It begins with the familiar phrase: *Hear my prayer, O Lord*. Then it sets off into a lugubrious lament evoking in vivid poetry a catalogue of sufferings that include fever, frailty, wasting away, acute pain, sleeplessness, melancholy, depression and despair. These opening verses (1-11) are the prayers of a seriously sick man. A turning point in these miseries comes in verse 12 with the words: *But you, O Lord...* followed by eloquent reminders that he is the God of heavenly eternity as well as of earthy time. His purposes have a long reach. So long that they will stretch to the rebuilding of Zion as an answer to prayer.

In the magnificent final verses of the psalm (23-28), the poetry rises to heights surpassing even those of Psalm 90. *Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you endure....*

At first reading this last section appears to be the voice of the Psalmist addressing God. Not so. The writer of Hebrews, who quotes those verses in his opening chapter, illuminates their true meaning with brilliant clarity. For verses 25-28 should be taken as God addressing the Messiah.

Once this interpretation is accepted, the psalm must be re-read. It is foreshadowing the story of one infinitely greater than the Psalmist: For the pain and suffering of the early verses (1-11); the life cut short (as in verses 23-28) and the final denouement stretching into eternity make this not only a great poem but also a great Messianic prophesy.

Monday April 4th

Introduction to Week V: Journey's End?

At the Easter Vigil, we read a section of the book of Exodus which describes the joy of the Israelites as they are freed from slavery and delivered from the vengeance of Pharaoh's troops (Exodus 15. 1-18). Miriam, the sister of Moses, sings,

Who is like you, O God, among the gods? Who is like you majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders?

It's a moment of pure joy at the People of God's deliverance, even though it marks the beginning of forty years living a nomadic existence, wandering through the desert.

We might expect an equally joyful end to Israel's hard journey in the desert, but this isn't what happens. The first five books of the Bible look forward with great intensity to the People of God's permanent settlement of the land promised to Abraham, Israel. But Deuteronomy, the final book of this set, fizzles out with Moses' death in the wilderness, one step before the fulfilment of the goal. There's not even a comforting assurance that the People of God will safely come to their new homes.

The final chapters of Deuteronomy set out two possibilities that were set out in the very first chapters of the book of Genesis: a choice between blessing and curse. The first possibility is blessing (Deuteronomy 28. 1-14); the second dreadful possibility is set out in a terrible warning of the danger of exile, in such detail that this seems almost a certainty (Deuteronomy 32. 15-43). The People of God are confronted with the unsettling reality of existence without the promised land.

This swerve in Deuteronomy can paradoxically offer us comfort. Despite the loss of what they had hoped for, Deuteronomy does hold out hope, not as a successful ending of the journey, but of a closer relationship with God. Their long journey leads us to deeper trust in God's purposes, although they seem hard to understand. It is in God alone, according to Deuteronomy, that our journey ends.

We are, most of us, weary of our long battle with Covid, still unresolved; we want to go back to how things were before the virus, but it is gradually becoming clear that we cannot do so — there may be many years of struggle remaining. The writer of Deuteronomy gives us courage and hope. Our journey does not end, but rather we are invited to step out again in deeper trust of God's purposes, and Deuteronomy offers us vivid images of the Lord to sustain us: God is *like gentle rain that falls on the grass and an eagle that hovers over us to protect us.*

For the People of God, journeys with God do not have an end, not even as our lives draw to a close. The journey of Jesus to Jerusalem did not end with his death; after the resurrection, he journeyed with the disciples, as he does with us. This insight is well caught by a Church father, Gregory of Nyssa,

To be a Christian means that we are always beginning again, beginning after beginning, beginning upon beginning, always beginning again with the Lord, never ending.

As we keep Holy Week together, may we all discover again the joy of beginning our journey again with the Lord.

Tuesday April 5th

Reading

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

Genesis 12.1-3

Reflection

Not knowing or uncertainty is a kind of darkness that many people find unbearable. Those who demand certitude out of life will insist on it even if it doesn't fit the facts. Logic and truth have nothing to do with it. If you require certitude, you will surround yourself with your own conclusions and dismiss or ignore any evidence to the contrary.

The very meaning of faith stands in stark contrast to this mindset. We have to live in exquisite, terrible humility before reality. In this space, God gives us a spirit of questing, a desire for understanding. In some ways it is like learning to 'see in the dark.' We can't be certain of what's in front of us, but with some time and patience, our eyes adjust, and we can make the next right move.

The Gospel doesn't promise us complete clarity. If God wanted us to have irrefutable proof, the incarnation of Jesus would have been delayed until technology and science could confirm it.

Scriptures do not offer rational certitude. They offer us something much better, an entirely different way of knowing: an intimate relationship, a dark journey, a path where we must discover for ourselves that grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness are absolutely necessary for survival in an uncertain world. You only need enough clarity to know how to live without certitude! Yes, we really are saved by faith. People who live in this way never stop growing, are not easily defeated, are wise and compassionate, and frankly, are fun to live with. They have a quiet and confident joy. Infantile religion insists on certainty every step of the way and thus is not very happy.

Richard Rohr, American Franciscan priest (b 1943)

Prayer

Teach us, O God, to view our life here on earth as a pilgrim's path to heaven,
and give us grace to tread it courageously in the company of your faithful people.
Help us to set our affections on things above,
not on the passing vanities of this world,
and grant that as we journey on in the Way of holiness
we may bear a good witness to our Lord,
and serve all who need our help along the way,
for the glory of your name. Amen.

Wednesday April 6th

Reading

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.'

Revelation 21. 1-7

Reflection

'It is abundantly clear that Christendom is dead; that is, the hope of Christianizing the world by Western imperialism has been exposed and recognized for the falsehood it was. In this sense the church, as Jeremiah and Jesus proclaimed, is going now into exile once more. It has again resumed its identity as a movement, a pilgrimage.'

James A. Sanders (1927-2020), American biblical scholar

Prayer

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

*Thomas Merton (1915-1968)
American Trappist Monk, Theologian & Poet.*

Thursday April 7th

Reading

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4. 16-18

Reflection

Thomas Merton wrote, 'there is always a temptation to diddle around in the contemplative life, making itsy-bitsy statues.' There is always an enormous temptation in all of life to diddle around making itsy-bitsy friends and meals and journeys for itsy-bitsy years on end. It is so self-conscious, so apparently moral, simply to step aside from the gaps where the creeks and winds pour down, saying, I never merited this grace, quite rightly, and then to sulk along the rest of your days on the edge of rage.

I won't have it. The world is wilder than that in all directions, more dangerous and bitter, more extravagant and bright. We are making hay when we should be making whoopee; we are raising tomatoes when we should be raising Cain, or Lazarus.

Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock-more than a maple- a universe. This is how you spend this afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you.

Annie Dillard (b 1945), American author

Prayer

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life,
until the shades lengthen and the evening comes,
the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done;
then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging,
a holy rest, and peace at the last,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*St John Henry, Cardinal Newman (1801-1890)
Priest, Theologian & Cardinal*

Friday April 8th

Reading

I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

Psalm 121. 1-8

Reflection

Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make the journey with us. So be swift to love and make haste to be kind.

Henri Frederic Amiel (1821-1881)
Swiss moral philosopher

You have to be silent before the mystery. In the Book of Job the 'comforters' are the ones who cannot be silent before it but must rush in with their explanations. You know your kinship with the mystery. By your closeness to Christ his mind is being formed in you and he is leading you into his own experience, his own joy and longing, and his own knowledge of the Father. Whatever the renunciations, the inner poverty and the successive little deaths and lettings-go, this life of contemplation is a life of joy, because lived in Jesus it is a journey into God, and unfinished tale.

As you ponder the word in your heart, like Mary pondering all her life mysteries she served and adored but did not fully understand, you are the Church. Like Israel, the Church is the womb-community sheltering mysteries not yet seen. The Church has received the word but must give it life within its own life, and let the word speak and speak again through every age and culture in its inexhaustible fullness.

Maria Boulding (1929-2009), English Benedictine nun

Prayer

Journey's End

O Father, give the spirit power to climb
to the fountain of all light, and be purified.
Break through the mists of earth, the weight of the clod.
Shine forth in splendour, Thou that art calm weather,
and quiet resting place for faithful souls.
To see Thee is the end and the beginning.
Thou carriest us, and Thou dost go before.
Thou art the journey, and the journey's end.

Boethius (480-524), Roman senator & philosopher

Saturday April 9th

Reading

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

John 14. 1-7

Reflection

With the drawing of the Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always-
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Poet & playwright

Prayer

Lord, God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eric Milner White (1884-1963)

Dean of York, academic, decorated military chaplain