



Week three (Trinity XV)

Repentance

Lectionary readings

Proverbs 1. 20-33

Psalm 19

James 3. 1 – 12

Mark 8. 27 – end

Collect

God, who in his generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

The Collect suggests that the generous mercy and love of God should be matched by a 'hot, zealous' ('fervent') discipleship of fellowship, faith and service.

Yet God's calling is not always understood, or appropriately acted on. Wisdom may call in the street, but can be refused and ignored (Proverbs 1:24-25).

Understanding God's ways and God's will

Psalm 19 begins with a wonderful recounting of how this beautiful world reflects God's glory in all its aspects.

The psalmist then indicates that there is a moral law of God's ways and God's will written in the human heart, just as there are laws of nature written in the glory of the heavens (Psalm 19: 1, 7) - which can bring wisdom, joy, light and a sweet taste in the mouth (verses 7, 8, 10). Yet sins can get in the way and need to be cleansed (v.12). *'Keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me.'* (Psalm 19:13).



We discover God's ways and God's will through the laws of nature, and through the moral law within our hearts - both made explicit through the witness of our Scriptures.

The Gospel passage is a warning that understanding God's ways and God's will is not necessarily the same as our hopes and our priorities. True discipleship can sometimes make demands which are radical, painful, vulnerable, unexpected. The calling is to go beyond what we think makes simply for our survival and protection. God's ways and God's will may require something deeper.

Jesus knew

Jesus already **knew** what his disciples were thinking when he asked them; *'Who do people say that I am?'* They did not understand. Jesus opened up to them the thought that it is only from the perspective of the risen victim - from the Passion, Cross and empty tomb - that they will understand. And then the discovery is surprising: in order to save life, life must be given.

Jesus knew what was to follow.

Discipleship is costly: Take up your cross

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me.' (Mark 8:34).

In the context of the threats posed to the planet by human action, and our consequent vulnerability, the temptation will be for self-protection and personal survival. It is disconcerting to find that one of the Gospel themes is that God calls us beyond survival and self-protection. We are called beyond trusting in the things we are tempted to think make up our good (wealth, prestige, the illusion of stability), to go instead the way of the Cross - which itself is life-giving.

Continuing to pollute the atmosphere when we know the dangers, goes against what we know of God's ways and God's will. We are failing to love not only the earth, but our neighbours and ourselves, who are made in God's image. God grieves over the destruction of creation and so should we. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God.)

Repentance

In the context of human-induced climate change, repentance means; *'finding creative, constructive and immediate ways of addressing the danger. It happens when God's Spirit enables a change of mind and change of heart, prompting a turn from past wrong and a decision to change direction. For our generation, reducing our dependence on fossil fuels has become essential to Christian discipleship.'* (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)



Tamsin Omond, founder of Climaterush, wrote: *'We cannot escape the truth of climate change, and so we shrug our shoulders, preferring to accept various facts: entire ecosystems have died..... As Christians, we are required to do more than accept the problems we create. We are challenged to repent. And repentance should be more than saying sorry. It requires a change of both heart and action.'*

Our repentance must be loud, and it must be visible, if we are to act as an example, and to suggest a way out of the complacency into which our society has sunk....

Quiet regret is not enough. We must assert our repentance for the misuse of creation. We need to unite our voices. If we could have the courage to challenge the status quo and all it represents, then we could force the Government to count the physical presence of our non-violent direct action.'

The life we are given, and may continue to be given, is somehow bound up with our vulnerabilities to each other; our living out fervently the life of repentance and faith, and confident trust – not in our own abilities, but in God who is our strength and our redeemer. It is a call to radical, costly discipleship.

'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.' (Psalm 19:14).

Questions to discuss and explore further

1. Does our discipleship necessarily involve sacrifice? If we have truly repented and humbly opened ourselves to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, will our new ways of low carbon living bring 'joy to the heart and light to the eyes'?
2. What can we do to ensure that our repentance is continual and real?
3. In what sense might our repentance not simply be a personal response, but a response by whole churches or communities?

A poem by Chris Polhill

Forgive us Lord for our thoughtless wasting
For heat blasting in open doorways - for lights burning in empty rooms
for homes basking in T-shirt warmth
forgive our thoughtless wasting.

For leaving windows draughty, for lagging left undone, for lofts un-insulated
forgive our thoughtless wasting.

For cars that guzzle petrol - for driving little journeys, for cheaper fares on planes
forgive our thoughtless wasting.

God grant us clear thinking, right action, and a gentle life-style. Amen

A closing prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made,
And forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts
That we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness,
May obtain from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.