

Sunday 17th March 2019

Second Sunday in Lent

Purple



Collect

Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Philippians 3:17-4:1 English Standard Version (ESV)

3¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

4¹ Therefore, my brothers,^[a] whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Footnote: a. Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses 8, 21

COMMENT: As this passage shows, Paul had a very close relationship with the Philippian congregation. None of his other letters express his love and concern for them in such intimate terms. This could well have been due to the story told in Acts 16 that it was in Philippi that Paul first made contact with a European community and founded the first European congregation there. The Philippians struggled with a problem we also face every day: how to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in a hostile environment in which the majority of our neighbours do not share our convictions. He faced death on a daily basis, particularly so if, as many scholars have concluded, he wrote this letter from prison either in Rome or in Caesarea Maritima, on the east coast of the Mediterranean, while on his way to Rome (Acts 25-26). Paul's advice was that the Philippians follow his example as he had followed Christ in living in this world, but with totally different values to guide them: "In the world, but not of it." In 3:20 Paul reminds us that we are citizens of heaven. It saddened Paul greatly that many chose "to live as enemies

of the cross of Christ” (verse 18). The essence of sin as he saw it was to continue to live in the spiritual dysfunctional way of selfishness, greed, hate and pride that brought about the death of Jesus on the cross. A so much better way lay in the way Jesus himself had lived. That too was the way Paul himself had tried to live, however imperfectly, since his conversion on the Damascus Road. He had said as much in the paragraph immediately preceding this passage. Lent is a time when we may examine our lives, confess our sins and renew our commitment to live differently. While Paul knew nothing about Lent, which did not become common in the church for another millennium, this is the pattern Paul set before the Philippians and ourselves two millennia later.

Luke 13:31-35 English Standard Version (ESV)

Lament over Jerusalem

13 ³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³² And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. ³³ Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ ³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

COMMENT: Some of the Pharisees were quite sympathetic to Jesus because he shared many beliefs with them, such as the Resurrection from the dead, and that Scripture was not restricted to the Torah, with the Books of the Prophets and such as the Psalms were accounted as Scripture. In John's Gospel, Nicodemus was one such Rabbi, and in all the Gospels, Joseph of Arimathea is another. Antipas who executed John the Baptist and would sought to execute Jesus, if he could have done so without causing a rebellion in his Galilean domain. Jesus spurned him as a sly fox (verse .32) knowing full well that Antipas feared his power to command significant support among his fellow peasantry as well as the more sophisticated party of Pharisees. This passage leaves us in no doubt that he did appeal to many Pharisees despite his frequent clash with them because of their sharp differences about dietary and sabbatical observances (such as noted in verse 31, and in the verse that follows today's passage; 14:1- where it states; “he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees”). Acknowledging himself as a prophet (verse 33), Jesus recognized that Jerusalem was the centre of all Jewish culture and religious tradition. He must go there; but he also realised what danger lay in wait for him (verse 34). Yet, like many of the great prophets before him, he knew that his mandate came from a higher authority, from the Lord and God of all (verse 35), who desires profound obedience expressed in love. This steady procession toward Jerusalem will lead to our Lord's passion, as he suffers and dies for our sakes, to purchase our redemption.

Psalm 27 *Dominus illumination* Grail Psalter

✠ The Lord is my light and my help.

¹ *Of David*

The Lord is my light and my help;

whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;

before whom shall I shrink? ✠

² When evil-doers draw near

to devour my flesh,

it is they, my enemies and foes,

who stumble and fall. ✠

³ Though an army encamp against me
my heart would not fear.

Though war break out against me

even then would I trust. ✠

⁴ There is one thing I ask of the Lord,
for this I long,

to live in the house of the Lord,

all the days of my life,

to savour the sweetness of the Lord,

to behold his temple. ✠

⁵ For there he keeps me safe in his tent
in the day of evil.

He hides me in the shelter of his tent,

on a rock he sets me safe. ✠

⁶ And now my head shall be raised

above my foes who surround me

and I shall offer within his tent

a sacrifice of joy.

I will sing and make music for the Lord. ✠

⁷ O Lord, hear my voice when I call;

have mercy and answer.

⁸ Of you my heart has spoken:

“Seek his face.” ✠

It is your face, O Lord, that I seek;

⁹ hide not your face.

Dismiss not your servant in anger;

you have been my help. ✠

Do not abandon or forsake me,

O God my help!

¹⁰ Though father and mother forsake me,

the Lord will receive me. ✠

¹¹ Instruct me, Lord, in your way;
on an even path lead me.

¹² When they lie in ambush protect me
from my enemy's greed.
False witnesses rise against me,
breathing out fury.

✠ The Lord is my light and my help.

¹³ I am sure I shall see the Lord's goodness
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Hope in him, hold firm and take heart.
Hope in the Lord! **✠**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This psalm originally existed as two separate psalms. Verses 1-6 are a superb song of trust. Verses 7-14 are a typical lament seeking God's help in trouble. However it came about, the psalm still has great value as an expression of personal trust in God.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you give us the spirit of discipline, that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace, as we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed.

Post Communion

Almighty God, you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**