



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Next before Lent, 8.30am Holy Communion 2021

Those amazing words from today's Epistle, so familiar from weddings especially.

I have often preached on them, naming the couple in the reading:

'Alex is patient, Sarah is kind. Alex never holds grudges, Sarah never demands her own way'...

It always gets a laugh, and it helps us to realise that love (especially as the world remembers a great Christian Saint of love today, the priest Valentine) love is not fluffy nonsense, or big occasions like weddings, it is the day to day humdrum, glorious mundanity of *people doing life together*. Putting love into practice, day after day and year after year is the point, not dresses and cakes and champagne.

Talking of putting into practice...

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells them what is about to happen; the journey *we* are about to live day after day as we make our pilgrimage through Lent to Holy Week and Easter: the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. And, we hear, 'they understood none of these things'.

How true that is of us too!

It takes a blind beggar in today's Gospel to show us what it really means.

The one who *can't see*, who has *nothing*, who has *failed* at life (as ever in the Kingdom of God) is the only one who *does* see, who recognizes the real *treasure*, and wins the day.

And what does he do? He cries out for mercy.

He calls on Jesus in trust and hope, nothing more and nothing less. To be with Jesus and all that we know comes of that is his only intention; he perceives that it is everything, and he goes for it whole-heartedly.

His words have inspired (along with another line from elsewhere in the Gospel) the petition that is known as the Jesus Prayer. It is particularly treasured by our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters. Some Orthodox Christians pray it as a mantra almost incessantly throughout the day. It is a wonderful mantra for Christian meditation; I use it every day through my time of silent prayer.

It is simply: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'.

This prayer mantra, inspired by today's blind beggar contains the whole Gospel and puts it into practice:

-Who Jesus is,

-and the intimacy of our relationship with Him.

-Our need of God's goodness and life,

-and as we say 'me', of course, as a member of the Body of Christ we *always* speak on behalf of the *whole* of the Church, and of *all* creation, joined as we are by our creatureliness.

As we go into Lent, a Spiritual and ritual wilderness, and as the Covid wilderness continues, we see, with all our blindness, something that has always been true, and which (like the Apostles) we don't always 'get', building our conditions and demands, our own temples and castles and saviours, our own projects and blabla bla, as we do.

We see the closeness to Jesus that is the only thing that gives healing and brings life. To be a creature in communion with our creator is the only thing that matters and the doorway from which all else leads. Nothing less and nothing more, and it is startling, and radical and real. And it has to be lived (put into practice) day by day, moment by moment, year by year. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me (on us) a sinner.

Lent is the Springtime for the Soul. We are being invited to learn to live again, learn to see again, in these holy days of Lent as we look for Jesus on the path, and seek the life that only He (as the source of all life and love) can give us: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'.