

Sermon, Second Sunday in Lent

St Mark's, Brookton & St Mary's, Beverley - Sunday, 13th March, 2022

Readings: Genesis 15:1-12; Psalm 27, Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

Hymns: Be thou my vision, Who would true valour see, This day God gives me, Hail to the Lord's anointed

It could be said that Usman Khawaja batted with great purpose in not only scoring a century on the opening day of the Second Test against Pakistan in Karachi but by batting through the entire day. I imagine the latter feat is a milestone not reached by many batters (as batsmen are called these days) in Test cricket. I wonder how many have achieved it. A search on Google or a question for the ABC cricket scorer Ric Finlay?

Having a purpose is something that has long been part of conversations and aspirations. Of recent years it has become very fashionable/trendy to be part of the corporate/managerial "speak" of our times; along with KPIs (Key Performance Indicator), SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. Even schools have them, though I think quite well of the Guildford Grammar School one which is "Inspiring students to achieve personal excellence and to be outstanding citizens who work to create a just, loving and peaceful society"; not least because of the quite obvious connection to the Christian values of peace, love and justice. In earlier days of my life, I seem to remember people speaking of someone needing to find a purpose in their life, or otherwise their life would continue to be rudderless and could end up "going off the tracks"!

Alongside wishing you a Holy Lent on Ash Wednesday, I might just as readily have wished you, or exhorted you, to a Purposeful Lent. If we need any reason to think that our Triune God requires us to be purposeful in our Lent, then our readings set for this the Second Sunday in Lent provide good encouragement!

Therefore, as I reflect upon these passages of Holy Scripture, may I invite you to be thinking of just how purposeful is your observance of Lent. Are you allowing this quite distinct season of preparation in the Church year to be lost to aimlessness, or are you giving thought to where and how and why the Gospel of Jesus Christ with its love for you shown through Jesus' crucifixion, not only fits into your life, but convicts you of all that you do and you are?

In the passage from the Book of Genesis we are introduced to God giving, through Abram, to those who would be his chosen people, not only land for eternity, but a purpose to go with it, as well as the relationship with God that would underpin it. In his conversation with Abram

God is laying the foundation of the nature of the nation of Israel – a place in which there will be as many descendants as there are stars?! If you recall, the journey to the Promised Land would not be an easy, for either the Jews, or at times the quality of their relationship with God. Nonetheless it certainly gave the people a purpose as they spent time meandering the desert!

In his Letter to the Philippians St Paul reminds them not to move away from their Purpose and succumb to the charms and actions of wayward people. They are to keep their eyes fixed on the citizenship of Heaven where our lowly bodies will become glorious. To that end, amidst all the trials and tribulations, the purpose, as should be ours, is to stand firm in the Lord – don't let your belly be your God, don't let shame be your glory, and don't set your mind on earthly things. That should seem very good advice to us, even if not always readily and easily achieved.

While the passage from St Luke's Gospel is often referred to as "The Lament on Jerusalem" which it is, for it recalls how so often God had sent prophets and messengers to that Holy City to redeem it but alas to no good end. However, what I recognise also in this passage is the enormously purposeful way in which Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem where he will fulfil the purpose of his Father, and in doing so will redeem the world, allowing for the gathering of all people unto God, through his enormous act of love and redemption of dying on the Cross. Unlike those before there will be no failing; Jesus must go with purpose, and he must go to Jerusalem!

It can be very easy to allow ourselves to wane in our resolve and purpose. We live in a world, as the great Greek Philosopher Plato described it in his book "The Republic", where for too many, and far too often, our lives are driven by appetite and base desires; those bellies, those earthly things, those shameful things!

We need to be ever asking God to strengthen our resolve, to be our guide, to love and keep us, such that people will say as St Luke records "Blessed are you who come in the name of the Lord." As with the record of the Acts of the Apostles, let us be with the earliest Christians people who will be noticed by the way our Faith and our Purpose convicts us as to what we do and what we say! Indeed, how we stand for that, which is far greater, far more liberating, and far more enriching!

May I conclude by wishing you a Holy and Purposeful Lent, seeking to be as Christlike and Christ filled as you can.