
Second Sunday of Lent.

Year B Mark 8. 31-end



This morning, in our Gospel reading we hear the First Prophecy of the Passion in verses 31 to 33 where Jesus reveals to his disciples that He must be rejected by the religious authorities, condemned to death and killed, but that he would then rise again after three days. This marks a major turning point in Mark's Gospel and from now on our focus moves towards the passion, towards the suffering and death of the cross, but if we can journey there, we will also find the resurrection. However, this is all too much for Peter.

Just before this passage, in verses 27-30 Jesus asks Peter 'who am I?' and Peter declares, 'You are the Messiah.' For Peter and many of his contemporaries at the time, the idea of a suffering Messiah was a completely foreign concept. For Peter and many of the Jews at the time, the messianic figure was to be the one who would liberate Israel and re-establish the Davidic dynasty. It was unthinkable that God will allow Jesus' powerful ministry of preaching and teaching to be disrupted in this way. For Peter, the Messiah was there to conquer, not to die; even though this was in the prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah. So, Peter responds and rebukes his master, but Jesus then issues his own rebuke. 'Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.'

Maybe, you might feel that Jesus responded rather harshly here, after all Jesus' sharpest reprimand in all the gospels is reserved for the one disciple that he had chosen to lead others. But let us have a closer look at this.

'Get behind me' expresses Jesus' rejection of Satan who was using Peter as a mouthpiece. In seeking to dissuade Jesus from the cross, Peter was making himself an opponent or an obstacle to the messianic mission. To do so was to play the role of Satan, tempting Jesus to be a messiah other than that willed by God.

'Get behind me' can also express Jesus' command to Peter to follow behind him as his disciple and not to presume to be the one who leads. It is Jesus' wish that Peter will at some point lead, Peter is the rock on which the Church shall be built, but in order to qualify to lead he must first be a follower of Jesus.

We can also look at Peter's rebuke of Jesus as a reaction based on fear and trepidation for what is to come, not only for Jesus but for himself and the other disciples. Surely if his master was to suffer a violent and horrific death then the followers of said master should expect to be in for equally brutal treatment? I don't know about you but if I was in Peter's shoes, I would certainly be worried about what was coming.

However, Jesus challenges this way of thinking and says Peter's mind, and maybe ours too, is focused on human concerns and that we do not have minds of God. The implication of this is massive because Jesus is telling us that mere human thinking is no longer enough and that we need to undergo a transformation of minds, one where we take on a new way of thinking, a divine way of thinking. According to human minds, defeat, humiliation and suffering make no sense and so neither does the passion. But God's thinking, or God's divine logic, leads us to understand the suffering of the cross as the path to victory. However, having divine logic will not make that path any less easy to tread and so we come to the next question, what is the true cost of discipleship?

In verse 34, Jesus says 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'. Jesus sets this as a condition for discipleship, discipleship isn't merely being a passive follower who comes along for a good time. Rather it involves real work, real sacrifice and along the way, real pain. To deny ourselves and take up our own crosses sounds terrifying, but what Jesus is trying to tell us here is that to be a follower of His means more than turning up to Church on a Sunday, it means more than reading your Bible and praying daily. To be a disciple of Jesus means that we must follow him in suffering so that the Kingdom of God may be revealed to others.

Now let me be very clear, I am not saying that we must follow Christ in literally suffering a painful death, but our discipleship cannot be comfortable either. If it has become comfortable then something is wrong. Discipleship is costly, but we are not alone. Jesus says, 'take up your cross and follow me', we go where our leader is taking us; we are not alone.

However, it is worth remembering that for many Christians direct persecution and suffering was and is a reality. Under the reign of Emperor Nero, Christians had been burned, thrown to wild beasts and crucified. Still today Christians are persecuted:

- There have been stories of Christians being burned alive by Islamic State Terrorists in Iraq and Syria.
- There have been recent reports of genocidal attacks targeting Christians in northern Nigeria.
- In certain countries, Christians are targeted by the authorities purely because of their faith.

There are also more subtle forms of persecution, forms which we may have experienced or witnessed within our own countries, communities, parishes or maybe even within our own families. How often are Christians pressured into tailoring their words so as not to offend or to win approval? How often are we tempted to soft-pedal the Gospel in order to conform with a society? How often are we tempted into making Christianity something soft and comfortable, rather than radical and transformational? How often do we fail to truly love God and love our neighbour because it is difficult, inconvenient or might lead to some funny looks?

The Church has always placed tremendous importance on not merely believing privately in one's heart, but confessing one's faith publicly. To be a disciple of Christ is to stand up and be counted. Since the time of Christ tens of thousands of martyrs have borne witness to the Gospel and to the message of God's love shown through the cross. Their witness was costly, the cost was their blood, but their witness has helped draw countless others to faith, inspired millions and shown to the world that the love of God in Christ can never be diminished. We may all not be called to that level of witness and sacrifice, but we are all called to stand up and be counted for the sake of the Gospel.

As we journey through Lent, let us pray for the grace to take up our cross and follow Him, the source of grace, redemption, and love. It won't be easy, and we might not know the exact implications of doing so...I certainly don't but then that is why faith is a journey, and remember we are not on this journey alone. The saints and martyrs are with us, the faithful company of heaven is with us, the Body of Christ which is the Church is with us and most importantly, Christ is with us.

Amen.

Jake Pass

Chaplain to the Humber Ports

Lent Reflections for 2021



Lent Reflection Week 3

The parable of the Good Samaritan triggered a warm feeling in me as a child. I still remember exactly when I heard the story for the first time in the children's service. Later, when I was involved in the children's service and told the children about the parable, it was one of my favourite stories. In my mother tongue, German, the term Good Samaritan is also used to describe people who support others in their need. In many interpretations, not only the origin of the Samaritan is emphasised, but also his professionalism in caring for the injured, and the skills and experience he uses to do so. Thus, the Good Samaritan has also become a symbol for medical professions and institutions. This story was the motivation and inspiration for me to choose a helping profession and to professionalise my aspiration to help others.

In my early days at the Seamen's Mission, over 20 years ago now, I saw seafarers first and foremost as people in need whom we help by picking them up from the ships (carrying them), providing them with the necessities (caring for them), having an open ear for them (giving them attention), and not infrequently also standing up for their rights (when others leave them lying). And all this regardless of their origin, their faith, their position on board.

A colleague reported at the time that she was on her way home in the middle of the night after a long shift and saw a figure on the side of the road. As she got closer, she thought the man looked like a sailor who had been in the mission that evening. And she was right, it was a Kiribati sailor sitting there huddled up. She got out and spoke to him. He cried bitterly and said, "I see my ship, it's over there, but I don't know how to get there." He had been walking around for some time and had not been able to find the road to the Terminal in the huge harbour area. I am sure that many cars had passed this sailor that evening. And I'm sure one or two others noticed him. But similarly, as in the parable, no one else stopped. Thanks to her professional eye, my colleague was not only able to perceive the sailor, but also knew what to do: she brought him to the ship and he was infinitely grateful.

Over time, my view of the seafarers broadened. Yes, they need support in many things. But isn't that also a very deficit view? At the same time, isn't it also the case that WE need THEM? Long before the pandemic, I often had conversations with seafarers who, when they heard that I was working as a volunteer and therefore unpaid, and actually had another job, sometimes almost asked in amazement why I was doing this. I then explained to them that I wanted to give something back because THEY provide for US. And that therefore, in addition to direct contact, lobbying was particularly important to me, to make society aware of the great achievement of these "undercover heroes". Seafarers are away from their families, their friends and their home country for a long time, often have to put up with difficult working conditions and may also be confronted with dangers (e.g., weather conditions, accidents, piracy). And they too, just like the Good Samaritan, have to contend with prejudice, depending on where they come from, what they believe in, what position they occupy on board, or simply because they are seafarers ("drunken sailors"). Of course, they do it mainly because it is their job, but so do people in medical or social professions. They help and support through their professionalism and with openness towards those in need. Seafarers are also highly qualified people; they must be.

And therefore, it was long overdue that they be recognised as essential workers, which has now finally happened because of the pandemic.

Although it's not completely comparable, I like the idea that we are all walking in the footsteps of the Good Samaritan.

Andrea Meenken, Panama

Lent Reflections for 2021



Lent Reflection Week 4

Many people in the world that seem to think that *faith* and *laughter* are somehow incompatible, if we believe then we must be somehow miserable about it. I've never thought that! It is *faith* that fills us with a desire to celebrate all that is good and discover how we can play our part in making the world a better place for all God's children.

Today, Mothering Sunday is celebrated in some parts of the Church, and it is indeed a special Sunday, but there is an even older name for this day, *Laetare Sunday*, which comes from the Latin for the first word of the traditional prayer. *Laetare* means rejoice.

So, this Sunday, in the middle of Lent, is a day for both *faith* and *laughter*. The purpose of the day is to take a break and think about all that is good in life and rejoice.

Many seafarers on ships today will be thinking about those who are, or who have been a mother to them. They will think of their loved ones so far away and give thanks for them. I never underestimate how strong seafarers are, they always surprise me. They quietly remember their life at home, even though they might be really missing all it means to them.

This Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Mothering Sunday, *Laetere* Sunday, I will be visiting ships and listening, asking seafarers to tell me about their *home* and what it means to them. I will also be supporting those who find it all too much on these special days. The Pandemic has been especially cruel to seafarers, away from home, not knowing when they will return, worrying about loved ones and thinking of their safety, it is difficult when you are thousands of miles away.

The work of the Mission to Seafarers throughout the world is to be a presence in the ports, in our centres and on the ships, sharing stories of life and rejoicing in all that is good, whilst supporting those who find themselves in difficult places.

Each and every day is different, and chaplains and ship visitors, centre staff and staff of all kinds find meaning in the little things, those things which help us to *rejoice* in the middle of great challenges. Your support, your prayers and your thoughts keep us going.

May we rejoice this day, for all the good things God has given us, and serve others in any way we can.

Fr. Mark Lawson-Jones,
South Wales Port Chaplain

Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent 2021



When Jesus lived in this world, he wandered around doing good. In the Gospel of John, the Evangelist has listed the first two miracles that Jesus performed in Cana. When we explore why Jesus did not begin his miracle in a glorious city like Jerusalem, but in Cana, we learn that in the first century, Cana was a village of many communities, both Jews and Greeks. From this, it is possible to know that Jesus manifested himself as the Savior of the world in a way that his salvation would reach the entire humankind, without applying his mighty miracles and blessings only to Jews or Greeks or to any particular community.

And the first miracle Jesus performed at Cana was at a wedding feast. Through that miracle the bridegroom is directly benefitted at the wedding house. And Jesus turned water into wine to perform his first miracle. The method of converting water into wine can be traced back to the Greek god Dionysus who was believed to have turned water into wine in the first century. Through this, we learn that the first miracle of Jesus was performed in the home of a bridegroom of Jewish background following the practices of a Greek religion called Dionysus Cult. Similarly the second miracle of Jesus took place through healing a royal official's son who was at the verge of death. Historical records state that this royal official was of Roman descent. In the first century, the son of Gamaliel was healed by the prayers of Rabbi Henina Ben Dosa. The place where Rabi Henina Ben Dosa prayed was far away from the place where Gamaliel's son was. Thus, people living in the first century believed that distance was not a barrier to prayer. In such an environment, just as Jesus was in Cana, he performed his second miracle through his mighty words in the life of a royal official's son who was far away in Capernaum. Through this, we find that this second miracle was done to a small child in a Gentile family following the traditional method of Rabi Henina Ben Dosa of Jewish background. Thus the miracles of Jesus are the miracles that apply to children, adults, Jews, Greeks, Romans and the entire humankind. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus revealed himself as the Savior of all humankind, regardless of religious or social differences. In particular he performed his first miracle at the request of a woman named Mary, the mother of Jesus. His second miracle was performed at the request of a man who was a royal official. Thus we can see that miracles of Jesus were full of such things.

Jesus has given us the opportunity to express His love to the seafarers when we meet them on board their ships through our MtS ministry. We are called by Jesus to meet their needs and give them comfort, encouragement and joy through our prayer and counseling. When meeting with crew on board, it is sometimes possible to meet only the crewmembers such as oiler, A/b, wiper, mess-boy, etc. Sometimes there will be an opportunity to meet the high-ranking ship's crew such as captain, chief officer, etc. We are obliged to express the love of Christ without any distinction in the context of meeting the seafarers of different faiths from different religious backgrounds in different countries. As the apostle Paul said, "I became all things to people of all sorts, that I might by all means save some", we, the MtS ministers should fulfill our service by love, help and prayer to the extent that we can express the love of Jesus in the life of the seafarers in this pandemic environment.

Earlier before the pandemic situation, they used to freely express their needs with us when we boarded their ships. They would say that they had got their shore pass and were ready to go with us to the MtS Centre. On the contrary in this tense situation of pandemic period, we see that the seafarers are in a state of reluctance to ask for anything and they mostly stay away for fear of the outbreak of Covid-19 while

traveling to various ports. The opportunity for the seafarers to go to the Flying Angel Centers has greatly minimized and so they are forced to spend their six to ten months of contract without having the facilities to go out of the ports to meet their needs. Even if medical needs arise, it is also possible to meet with seafarers who think that the treatment can be postponed for as long as possible until the completion of their contract. We are obliged to pray for the welfare of the seafarers who are playing a vital role in the economy to bring the world back to normalcy. As soon as these circumstances change, the seafarers can happily work on the ship and spend their time happily arriving at the port. We pray that the right and precise medicine should be found and the worldwide spread of Covid-19 should be controlled and the world should return to normality. It can also be seen that during these pandemic periods, the seafarers have more worries about their families and loved ones at home. In the midst of all this, the MtS is carrying out the love of Christ, as a bridge between the seafarers and their family members. It can be seen that God is fulfilling His plan of meeting the needs of the seafarers through the MtS in this world. May these Lenten days be the days of prayer and love for one another, and may many services be rendered to the seafarers by the MtS ministers and may God be glorified through it! Amen.

Revd Isaac Franklin

Chaplain

Tuticorin Seafarers' Centre

Reflection for the Last Sunday of Lent 2021



Believe the Unbelievable

In this last week of Lent, we see how Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin, sentenced to death, how he suffered torture and eventually succumbed to a gruesome crucifixion. His Disciples were beside themselves, wondering why the One person they put their hopes in to rescue them from the Roman oppression, is now no more!

How can the mighty Son of God be dead?!
Why didn't He save himself and come down from the cross?!
Who will save us now?!

I can only imagine that these were some of the questions asked as they stood in front of the cross looking at Jesus' lifeless body.

Death was the end for them then.....but Jesus rose again!

In our life of faith, we learn that God Almighty has plans much bigger than ours; He has plans that cannot be thwarted; His plans which we will never be able to understand with our human minds.

What was his plan?

What the disciples didn't realize is that God sent His sinless Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth to die for the sins of the world. Through His death, all humanity will be saved from the clutches of eternal death. His Plan was borne of Love for you and me, and He continues to share that Love through His Holy Spirit. The Mission to Seafarers is 165 years old this year, but we are still relatively unknown in some parts of the world. Some seafarers, who have encountered us in our ports, have seen our logo, and perhaps even seen our faces on returning visits. There aren't many however who fully understand and know what our global mission is and/or does.

The Mission to Seafarers (formerly The Missions to Seamen) is a Christian welfare charity serving merchant crews around the world. It operates through a global Mission 'family' network of chaplains, staff and volunteers and provides practical, emotional and spiritual support through ship visits, drop-in seafarers centres and a range of welfare and emergency support services. Our Mission is to care for seafarers all around the world. We are in 50 countries and over 200 ports.

Some seafarers will arrive at a port, and wonder: *"who is there in this foreign port that will be able to help us. We are not allowed any shore leave; we cannot go to the seafarers centre or to town...who will care for us? Here I am, standing at the top of the gangway wondering."*

There in the distance I see a Mission bus, I see a Port Chaplain, I see a welcoming smile.

“Who will save me from this prison of a ship, Chaplain?”

The Chaplain welcomes you to the port, assists you with your needs, and prays for you.

In conclusion, sometimes we see just what our eyes tell us to see. We see despair, we see hopelessness, we see our hopes dashed.

We serve a Father God; whose ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). Let us therefore know that there is always something happening in the background, let us see with our eyes of faith that someone is there to help us, and let us believe the unbelievable.

Prayer:

Lord God, thank you that things aren't always as they seem, that You are always there to save us even when things seem bleak. Thank you too for the Mission to Seafarers personnel who have been passionately serving seafarers these last 165 years.

Please forgive me for not seeing the unseen, and help me overcome my unbelief.

I take this opportunity to accept you as my Lord and Saviour, and commit to trusting You for the rest of my life. In Jesus' wonderful name, I pray.

Amen!

Jesus said, *“So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing”* – John 20:29 (The Message)

Mark G. Classen,
Port Chaplain
The Mission to Seafarers
Port of Richards Bay