



Sunday, 7 April 2019 – Passion Sunday
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Gospel St John 12: 1-8
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Preparing for Easter

On this Passion Sunday, as we draw closer to Jesus' suffering and sacrifice on the cross, the hardest lesson to comprehend is the enormity of God's love for us.

Challenges of disbelief

Every day in his ministry Jesus faced untold frustrations of peoples' disbelief and yet he continued to do his Father's will to the end. We too know in a secular context the daily frustrations we endure living side-by-side with other people. We offer someone what we think will help to make their life easier but they still complain because it means climbing out of a well-worn groove, to see things from a fresh perspective

Daily living and daily challenges

Then there's the petty annoyances: driving along in a queue of traffic, we stop to let someone out of a side-road and that driver doesn't even give so much as a second look let alone an appreciative wave of thanks.

Or, someone in a supermarket stampedes round us with their heavily laden shopping trolley in order to check-out before us with our modest basket of goods. Glancing at the long lines behind other tills we resign ourselves to a long wait. These are examples of everyday common courtesies or, rather, the lack of them but let's apply this to a spiritual context.

Spiritual daily challenges

Jesus instructed his disciples in a life-giving way of worshipping and serving God. No more was access to God's grace and forgiveness through the go-between of adherence to Jewish ritual. All that was necessary was to love God and their neighbour as themselves. You would think that this would be a matter for rejoicing from all quarters but no! The leading lights in Jewish religion society were aghast: Jesus' form of faith could make them redundant. They enjoyed the spiritual talk but they had closed their minds to fresh perspectives in faith. Their hearts remained closed to God preferring instead to worship the ritual rather than the God who loved them.

No wonder that Jesus with righteous wrath cleansed the Temple from the circus of money-changers and animals being bought and sold for sacrifice for none of that

was necessary. God, in Christ, had come to his Temple but they couldn't or wouldn't see it.

Then there were the 10 lepers who begged Jesus to heal them. Mindful of their need to be accepted back into society, Jesus instructed them to go to the priests to confirm that they were clean and, as they went on their way, they were healed. Only one of the nine had the grace to turn back and thank Jesus. He is a Samaritan, a stranger in the midst of Jews but not only does he adopt the common courtesy of the land but he recognises a power higher than earthly powers and finds salvation. The nine Jews once certified clean doubtless picked up their lives where they had left off but one wonders, what was the state of their relationship with God? Personal? Or, constrained by a heritage of religion? Jesus was doubtless saddened that they had failed to grasp the basics that wholeness through God's grace is more powerful than physical healing.

Even the disciples suffered from first in the queue syndrome saying 'Lord when you come into your kingdom let me sit on your right side and my brother on your left.' We can only imagine the weariness of Jesus when he explained that faith is not about priority in the pecking order but rather putting self, last, after God and others, just being willing to serve with heart, soul and mind. God's rewards are eternal not material.

Limitless love

Meanwhile, Jesus continues his ministry, pouring out his limitless love knowing that ultimately his actions will have to speak louder than his words. He will have to pay the ultimate sacrifice: his life, for the life of the world. He continues serving the none-so-blind-as-them-that-won't-see; the ungrateful; the social climbers and all sorts and conditions of people including people, like you and me.

Loving action speaks louder than words

In the Gospel, at what was intended to be a thanksgiving meal to Jesus for Lazarus' return from the dead, we heard that Judas sours the occasion. He doesn't grasp the enormity of Jesus' sacrificial ministry his mind is still fixed on earthly power and material wealth. Mary, however, does understand that Jesus has turned power and worldliness on its head hence her staggeringly extravagant gesture. In her own way she acknowledges the sacrificial, all out-pouring, unceasing, unconditional love of her Lord.

What do we think?

So, what does God's love mean to us? He who gave his all for us asks nothing in return except that with open hearts, hands, and minds we receive and share his love. How unconditional is our love? How loving is our service?

Amen.