



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 20 March 2022 – Lent 3
Readings: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 & St Luke 13: 1-9
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Heading for a fall?

'If you think you're standing, watch out that you do not fall.' So wrote St Paul to the Corinthians. Pride, comes before a fall, as I ably demonstrated to my husband, when showing off my prowess of my ability to stand on one leg! Just to explain, current medical wisdom is that balancing on one leg improves ones' memory and slows brain-aging. The more serious point that both St Paul in Corinthians, as also Jesus in the gospel, were making was that human spirituality pivots on balance. Let me explain.

Take care that the ordinary does not take over

Just like me standing on one leg, there are many activities in our lives that in themselves are not inherently bad. The problem comes when a particular activity consumes more of our time than is good for our well-being, whether physical, mental or, most damaging of the lot, spiritual. St Paul warned the Corinthians and it's a warning to us today, that we can make idols out of anything taking our focus away from our faith. When that happens, the balance has gone from our lives and we head for a fall, as the next temptation presents itself. What affects us, has a knock-on effect on others. We only need to remind ourselves of how temptation in the Garden of Eden brought about the fall of man. Adam and Eve lived in the place of God's perfect, creative balance. They chose, however, to listen to the seductive voice of the serpent rather than turning to God, as the post-communion prayer urges, 'to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.'

What goes around comes around

In the Gospel, Jesus too illustrates his comments for a similar reason. He starts by quoting two factual incidents that happened during the Roman occupation of Israel. Pontius Pilate wasn't stupid but his ethics lacked a moral compass. Jerusalem needed a better water supply, so Pilate determined to construct an aqueduct to solve the issue: a laudable project. The problem came when he made an unprincipled grab to finance the project by raiding the Temple coffers. The Jews, not unnaturally, were up in arms. Whilst offering sacrifices in the temple some of them were slaughtered by the Roman soldiers in the melee that ensued. Potentially, those who died in the collapse of the Tower of Siloam, were those constructing the water course. Jesus, knowing that the Jewish mindset deemed sin and suffering to be inextricably linked, explained that those who died were no worse spiritually than those who survived. The spiritual compass of everyone was out of balance and all needed to repent and change their ways to flourish faithfully.

Nature v nurture

Jesus illustrated his thoughts with the parable of the fig tree. Just like a fig tree exhausting the nutrients from the soil in which it was planted, excessive Jewish religious fervour was preventing focused spiritual fruitfulness. The gardener urged the owner of the property to let him tend the fig tree for one more year, but if it remained unfruitful it would be felled. The tragic allegory here, in that Jesus had been conducting his ministry for three years and, ever hopeful, sought to feed the Jews into fruitful understanding. Sadly, they were not willing to change and, in the Garden of Gethsemane, they would arrest the gardener and then collude with the person they despised, Pontius Pilate. The one who had come to bring life, they would crucify. Thankfully, we know that that was not the end of the story. Three days later, in another garden, Mary Magdalene initially thinking she was talking to the gardener, knew when he called her name, that new life had burst forth: Christ had risen. Ultimately, for the Jews entrenched in their ways, Pilate would bring about the destruction of Jerusalem, just as Jesus had prophesied.

Stepping away from the coal face

Similar to the Jews occupied by the Romans, our minds are focused on the modern-day occupation of the Ukraine by Russia and the knock-on effects for all of us, which are yet to unfold. The season of Lent urges us to step aside from our daily concerns for a while and refocus on matters that have eternal consequences. We're all called to work in a part of God's Garden, so how can we ensure that we flourish and not fall? It needs inner vision to live out Christ's teaching of love, mercy and truth in our life of faith, only then is there balance, so that we can stand on solid ground. The questions to ask this Lent, to help focus our vision are: What needs to change in me personally in order to flourish more faithfully? What needs to change in our church to flourish faithfully? And, what will the consequences be, if we do not change?

Amen.