

A Message from Mary-Beth

This year, it seems as though we've been in Lent for many months already. Lent is about turning away from sin and seeking to be more faithful to Christ. It's a process which involves becoming vulnerable, picking through the ashes of our former lives and lamenting what we may see. This year, it seems our hearts were vulnerable and our heads weary long before we began this penitential season. Since the pandemic began in 2020, we've experienced frustration, fear and anxiety, especially as we've lurched from one lockdown to the next, and seen the impact of a dreadful disease upon our world.

Jesus tells us that if we want to become his followers, we must deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow him. As a Christian, I've always found this teaching hard to follow. It goes against my vision of Jesus as the light of the world, as the healing light of God to all of humanity. And, if I'm honest, it goes against my very human desire to avoid pain. It's especially difficult now because a heavy cross, a mental burden, has been weighing us down for a long time.

Jesus foretells the excruciating suffering he will undergo on Good Friday and, as we know the story so well, it's particularly poignant for us. I confess to solidly identifying with Peter in this passage. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him for this negativity. I can just hear him saying to Jesus-- 'Lord, you are the Messiah. You don't have to go through this. Your Holy Father will protect you.' Much to Peter's surprise, Jesus rebukes *him*. He tells him not to interfere with God's divine plan. It's another heart wrenching moment.

But then I find myself drawn to another part of Jesus' teaching. He predicts His return in glory, ushering in the powerful Kingdom of God. That is the Good News which Jesus brings to our vulnerable hearts and weary minds. And so, I see the cross in a different light-- it is a way to the light of Christ, to the everlasting, glorious and powerful Kingdom He shares with of His Father. It is a sign of hope and redemption.

So how can do we make our Lenten journey, then, in the midst of our pandemic, weariness and vulnerability? How do we go from the suffering cross to the glory of God's Kingdom?

The cross calls us to live lives of service, to stand in the earthly shoes of our Saviour and become His servants in the world. It is a world which is suffering now but which will usher in God's glorious Kingdom. It's a world which offers us hope.

So, as we reflect on our lives today, we consider how Jesus is calling us to serve in His place, to do the work of His hands, His heart and His mind. To work faithfully all the time, regardless of what is happening around us, regardless of the stages of the pandemic. To draw upon the hope that our Saviour gives to us, as we strive to bring that hope to others.

May God bless you in your daily Lenten journey.

Mary-Beth

