

21-02-28 Lent 2 Year B
Genesis 17.1-7,15-16; Romans 4.13-25; Mark 8 31-38

Hope in the Air

The blackbirds have been singing; by day and owls calling strongly at night: they sense Spring approaching. There has been a note of hope in air for us as the government laid out a plan for return to meeting face-to-face.

In the readings today Genesis 17 reminds us that Abraham and Sarah had a call to walk with God and a promise they would become the parents of a great nation that would bring blessing to the world. But Romans 4 strikes a sombre note: Abraham and Sarah waited years in the hope of having just one son to start the family off. All that waiting was a time of great suffering for them.

We all have a calling from God: a general one to see ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ, to be people who come together to love and worship him and to live our lives serving the kingdom of God. That calling is the same for us all.

But we each have a particular calling to do our work in the place where we live using the gifts God has given us. God may have called us to care for a piece of land or a house, to raise a family, to work in a business, to play a part in various social circles. When we recognise these as our calling from God it gives them meaning and value in our lives. We can know that in all the daily routine we are here because this is where God has called us to be. Lockdown has given us plenty of time to think about where we are and what God wants us to be and do.

Jesus was conscious of his calling from God and, as the time for him to go to Jerusalem approaches, he sees great suffering ahead before his story reaches its glorious climax. Lent is a time that invites us to face some of our suffering. We can look honestly at how we feel about the painful things, the disappointing things in our lives. It is easy to cover them up by distraction, being busy, not thinking about them. But if we do that, the danger is that we do not notice how we are feeling about God. Perhaps we are beginning to distrust God. Faith falters, our love for him cools a bit and we make it hard for his love and comfort to get through to us.

So Jesus invites us to trust him and face the things we are suffering with hope that there is joy ahead. He says, 'Deny yourself'. That is, say 'no' to distractions, 'no' to resentments, 'no' to the pride which tells me I can manage on my own. Then he adds, 'Take up your cross'. In other words, pick up whatever burden of suffering, pain, disappointment you are aware of and walk alongside Jesus. He carried a much greater burden of suffering right to the point of death and he overcame it.

O joy that sleekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.

'Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts.' (Romans 5v5)

Rev Vera Sinton