

St Columba: Lent 5, 29th March 2009

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Jer 31:31-14
John 12:20-33

Reassurance at the edge.

We have been traveling through Lent, the season in the Church's calendar when we take time to 'introspect' – to have a good look at our lives in relation to the call of God and the expectation of 'covenant living'. It has been a time of considering what we value, who we respect and are thankful to have in our lives, a time of looking beneath the surface, of attending to how our world expresses the call of God to us to live justly and gently in the earth.

Today we arrive at the Sunday in Lent immediately before the festivities of Palm Sunday and the last stages of the journey of Jesus into Jerusalem and his meeting with Pontius Pilate.

Today we are invited by the lectionary readings to consider what it means to be poised on the edge of something...

Have you ever felt yourself to be poised on the edge of something...not sure what is going to happen next? Perhaps a sense of being 'in transition'; autumn is conducive to that feeling...we have left summer behind and winter is not yet here. No longer do we have the reassurance of the warmth and confidence of summer and winter with its longer periods of darkness and cold is less hospitable. Many of us have to learn to love winter and seek out its unique gifts. The season of autumn is a great living metaphor for the transitioning season of Lent.

Both the readings set for this morning speak of transitioning between what was and what will be. Both are poised on the edge so to speak. Jeremiah is speaking at a time when the northern kingdom of the Israelites are a conquered people living under Assyrian rule, and the southern kingdom of Judah is caught between the Babylonians and the Egyptian Empire. They were conquered by the Babylonians as Jeremiah prophesied. But we pick up the story when Jeremiah is prophesying again; this time declaring that God would renew his promise to Abraham and make a new covenant; this time God and humankind will be in it together. Success will not depend on one person, Abraham, Sarah, or Noah. It will be a covenant written on the hearts of all the people, not able to be broken for deep in their hearts they will know the way of God they will always be forgiven. Then Jeremiah goes on to paint a picture of the world where love and justice and the way of compassion is present. And so we move from the personal commitment of Abraham, Sarah and Noah to a communal response. The two are balanced: personal and communal.

But should the people take any notice? Do they dare take the leap of faith that is required to change and move into the community of promise?

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies Jesus tells his followers it remains just a single grain. But if it does die, much fruit will result. The individual and the communal, the edge of the unknown, the period of transition, the autumn story, the journey to Jerusalem...

But should we accept this? Should we listen? Can we leap?

Jesus reassures his followers, including the Greeks who wanted to assess the situation and trustworthiness of the man with their own eyes, that God would honour the covenant.

Sometimes I think this passage is an example of what in current language is 'self-talk'. Jesus acknowledges his heart is troubled, and seems to be persuading himself as much as others, that the journey to Jerusalem and what clearly could be major trouble, is necessary...

He might die; perhaps he has to die, just like a grain of wheat so that others will live...but

Not just eating and breathing living - rather have life in all its fullness...and

Full life is what following the way of Jesus invites us into

- A way that serves the covenant of justice-making love
- A way that embodies hope-bringing action,
- A way that knows God is with us and supports our best efforts...
- A way that God wrote on the hearts of all people, and that if we look inside ourselves we know is the way that brings life.

This is the way of the covenant that God has established with all the people.

Will we move off the edge and risk being caught up in this movement that will know struggle and hope? Are we reassured by the stories of faith mirrored in the seasons of our year, that life will overcome death and that the season of growth and fruitfulness will follow winter?