

Coming Up at St Mark's

LENT MISSION COURSE:

Litter pick - pickers and bags provided. **Start at church**

Saturday March 9th 10am - 12noon

Contact Jon Dening dening@me.com or 874304.

Oatlands Free Car Washing

Come and wash cars on the streets – for free! Sunday 10th March, 2-4pm. From church. Bring a bucket and sponge.

Ashfield Home Spend time with residents and share communion

Monday 11th March, 1.45pm.

Lent Lunch for our charities.

Thursday March 14th, 12pm.

Contact Jose Rhodes.

j.a.rhodes@talktalk.net

Friday 22 March at 7 for 7.15 pm

until 9.30 pm: **an evening on**

Emotional Intelligence. Dr David Walton, psychologist and author of "Emotional Intelligence - a practical guide." This is an evening for everyone to find out what it is and how it can affect your health, your relationships and your family.

Tickets - £5, this includes light refreshments. Tickets are available from the Wellspring office: 01423 881 881 or

office@wellspringtherapy.co.uk

All proceeds go to Wellspring



Please pray for...

Give thanks for the development of the strategy being looked at by the PCC, and pray that it will be well communicated from April.

Pray for the group from St Mark's currently visiting the Holy Land. Pray for a fruitful trip and safety while travelling.

Please continue to pray for Andrea and David O'Neill at this time.

Pray for the couples getting married at St Mark's this year.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for Al Shurooq School for the Blind in Bethlehem, providing care and education for blind children brought to them from the West Bank and Gaza.

<http://www.nsfvh.org>

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

Whole Church Prayer Meeting Wednesday
13th March, 7.30pm.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Lent Worship:

Week beginning: 3rd March 2013

Every week during Lent there will be a suggested activity you can do to make your journey towards Easter. Read John 13: 2-5 & 12, 14, 17. Imagine Jesus washing your feet (You may like to place your feet in water.) Pray for a servant hearts. Place the basin and towel by your cross. Next week you will need: **a cup and some wine.**

The Way of Jesus and conflicting choices – Who are you following?

"I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves". This does not sound appealing. By the sound of it I think I would prefer to be the wolf. I'd get my mint sauce ready. If Jesus was doing a recruitment drive he could have probably come up with a better pitch. Jesus, the good shepherd, is sending his dear little lambs "into the midst of wolves".

It is not easy following the way of Jesus. It is not the easy option. It never has been, and, taking one look at our culture today, it's not getting any easier – profess to be a follower of Jesus at work or going through school and your likely to get some stick... I'll tell you from personal experience! Acknowledge it before others and you're likely to get looks of pity, embarrassment, anger, or worse. It is costly. You will be called to make choices that conflict with other people's expectations. Every one of us will face decisions each day, be they small or significant, as to whether we follow the way of Jesus or not.

So why follow? Why put ourselves through it!? Should we get our coats and go home now!? Before we begin to explore that question, a true story to expand our theme:

It is 1996, in Algeria, North Africa. A group of French Cistercian monks are living in the mountains, leading a simple life serving the poor community that was raised around the monastery. During the Algerian Civil War, there is a surge of violence as a group of extremist guerillas brutally murder foreign construction workers. It becomes clear that the monks' lives are in grave danger unless they flee the country under the protection of the military government. The monks must decide: Do they abandon the community for the assurance of physical safety or do they remain in the village and face the immanent consequences? It is not a simple decision.

The film 'Of Gods and Men' tells the story of this dilemma and the deliberations of the monks. It is deeply moving and poignant.

In one scene, as the extremists reach the monastery demanding that the monks use medical supplies (reserved for the local poor) to treat injured militants, the leader of the terrorist group threatens Christian, the head of the Cistercian monastery, saying “Enough! You have no choice!”. The monk replies “Yes. I do. We can’t give what we don’t have”. We all have a choice. Every day we make decisions as to whom we are going to serve and follow. Who’s empire are we going to build?

Often these choices can be driven by fear. It might not be as pronounced as the fear that comes from looking down the barrel of a gun but, nevertheless, it is fear – fear of rejection, fear of missing out, fear of the cost, fear of being disappointed.

Jesus offers an outrageous command to those who follow him – fear not! “Have no fear of them... do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul”. It sounds ludicrous! But when we find our identity in the God who made heaven and earth, when we realize that all we have comes from him, when we are liberated by the truth of knowing his saving hope, when we are filled with his Spirit, reliant on his resource, we begin to see things in perspective – we see that Jesus, the way, the truth, the life, is worth following through whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. He is worth-y.

So we come back to the question – why follow?

Why do those early disciples put up with so much persecution, so much oppression? Why are they prepared to give so much? Why do Christians to this day, proclaim Jesus as Lord when they know that in saying so they face ill-treatment, hardship and brutality? Why should the schoolchild or the office worker face being ostracized and rejected because of Him whom they proclaim? Why not just avoid the whole shebang?

Well, what do they say? Let’s look at one of them. He’s called Paul. He had something of an enviable status – he was admired and respected, acclaimed for his passion and commitment, and in a position of influence. But he relinquished all of these things, all of the safety nets, so that he could follow Jesus with everything that he had. This is what he says in the middle of a painful situation:

“I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance. It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again”.

Liberation. Paul knows what it is to be free. Even when imprisoned and in chains – Joy! Hope! Liberty! Do you not want to know that kind of freedom?

So when we find that the way of Jesus conflicts with choices we are facing, when we are sheep in the midst of wolves, we look to the one who we follow. We trust -even through the valley of the shadow of death we shall fear no evil.

As followers of the way we will face trials and troubles. But it’s not about being a victim. It’s so easy to look at our culture and protest about being marginalized and victimized – to play the victim.

It’s not about making sure we defend ‘the right of Christians’ as if we were defending God.

Jesus, knowing the difficulties that we will face, offers some advice – “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”. I think often in our churches there has been an emphasis on being as innocent as doves – gentle, kind, caring – but I wonder how many sermons you’ve heard about being “wise as serpents”? Time and again through the Gospel accounts we see Jesus being canny. Here’s one example:

“So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. So they asked him, ‘Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?’ But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, ‘Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?’ They said, ‘The emperor’s.’ He said to them, ‘Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” (Luke 20:20-25)

I love this passage. If this was a youtube clip it might be entitled ‘The scribes and elders OWNED by Jesus’. Jesus knows that it is a trap and turns the entire emphasis of the question on its head. The interrogators become the interrogated. The point wouldn’t have been lost on them or those who were listening. Why are you being complicit in evil? Why are you pretending to serve God’s purposes? Why are you not focused on giving back to God what is God’s?

The question once again comes back to ‘who are we serving?’ Who’s empire are we building? Who are we following?

We find our true place, our true home when it is Jesus who we follow.

In many situations and scenarios in our lives we will be called to choose between conflicting options – to follow Jesus, or to follow another way. Which way will we go? Often these choices are far from easy and rarely simplistic – they require thought, prayer and courage.

Study and Application (Living it out)

- **What does it mean today to give to God what belongs to him?**
- **Where have you faced conflicting choices – whether to follow the way of Jesus or another way?**
- **Are any of the choices that you make driven by fear? What is the nature of the fear and how might you face it?**
- **Read the following three situations (or you might like to offer your own) – how would you respond?**

- You work in a small independent business. Your boss is away for the day and has asked you to pay the delivery driver, cash in hand, with money from the takings from the week that haven’t been declared. The business is struggling but is just about managing to stay afloat, although money is tight and every penny counts. What do you do?

- You volunteer at a local homeless shelter. You have built up a good relationship with one of the individuals who uses the project and they have shared some of their struggles with you. You feel compelled to pray with the individual but your supervisor has reminded you that the code of conduct explicitly states that this is deemed inappropriate. How do you respond?

- You work for a large financial services company. Your manager has praised your performance recently and a promotion is mooted. They have asked you to lead a pitch to an important client, but you are aware that several of the key details that you will be expected to present are fabricated in order to portray your company in a favourable light. You have a large mortgage to repay and a promotion would really help... what do you do?