**Tuesday in Holy Week 2021**

**Collect :** Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Reading: 1 Cor 1, 18-31**

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
    and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm**

1    In you, O Lord, do I seek refuge;  ♦

let me never be put to shame.

2    In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free;  ♦

incline your ear to me and save me.

3    Be for me a stronghold to which I may ever resort;  ♦

send out to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

4    Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,  ♦

from the grasp of the evildoer and the oppressor.

5    For you are my hope, O Lord God,  ♦

my confidence, even from my youth.

6    Upon you have I leaned from my birth,

when you drew me from my mother’s womb;  ♦

my praise shall be always of you. [*R*]

7    I have become a portent to many,  ♦

but you are my refuge and my strength.

8    Let my mouth be full of your praise  ♦

and your glory all the day long.

9    Do not cast me away in the time of old age;  ♦

forsake me not when my strength fails.

10  For my enemies are talking against me,  ♦

and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together.

11  They say, ‘God has forsaken him;

pursue him and take him,  ♦

because there is none to deliver him.’

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**

**As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

*Hymn: We sing the praise (NEH 94)*

**1 We sing the praise of him who died,  
of him who died upon the cross;  
the sinner's hope let men deride,  
for this we count the world but loss.**

**2 Inscribed upon the cross we see  
in shining letters, 'God is love';  
he bears our sins upon the tree;  
he brings us mercy from above.**

**3 The cross! It takes our guilt away:  
it holds the fainting spirit up;  
it cheers with hope the gloomy day,  
and sweetens every bitter cup.**

**4 It makes the coward spirit brave,  
and nerves the feeble arm for fight;  
it takes its terror from the grave,  
and gilds the bed of death with light:**

**5 The balm of life, the cure of woe,  
the measure and the pledge oflove,  
the sinner's refuge here below,  
the angels' theme in heaven above.**

**Gospel (John 12, 20-36)**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

**Thanks be to God**.

**Address**

The ‘word’ (logos) of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.’

The NT uses the word ‘**logos**’ which is translated by the NRSV as ‘message’. We can play around with this idea, because the Word (logos) that pitched a tent among us, is the Word that now inhabits the cross.

It is crystal clear that the cross is at the very heart of Paul’s understanding of ‘the mystery of our faith’. He could easily have preached exclusively about the powerful deeds done by Jesus in order to promote the ‘wonder-worker to end all wonder-workers’ in order to persuade a listening audience, but there is no easy faith as far as Paul is concerned. To follow Jesus means to take the rough with the smooth – we can’t pick and choose the nice bits and form ourselves around those positive and encouraging stories. The story, the message, the word is ‘cross’.

The two big cultural backgrounds to Paul’s world were firstly Judaism (he himself is a Pharisee and a well qualified teacher of the Jewish faith). Given the perimeters of Paul’s mission it was mostly the Jews of the diaspora he encountered ie Jews ‘living abroad’ as we might say. Secondly there was the pagan world – a world imbued with myths and legends of the pantheon of Gods and demi-heroes. Underpinning this, at least in Paul’s area, is Hellenism with its culture of Greek philosophy. This had permeated almost all regions of the Roman Empire.

In Corinth the Apostle addresses both Jewish and Hellenistic culture with the message, the word, of the cross.

To the one it is a scandal, a stone to trip over, a stumbling block; it is just inconceivable and incompatible with an understanding of God. Not only did it involve a death, it involved a death by crucifixion, and the OT makes it clear that even the ground underneath a crucified body was unclean. To the sophistry of Hellenism, that a god would die on a cross, is just plain stupid.

But this is the Christian revelation – this is the message of the gospel. It is the cross that is the medium of the good news to all people about Jesus, and the new relationship of freedom and inclusion both with one another, but also as a new revelation about the world and about God. The chains fell off – the thralldom of Paul’s culture norms, that no one ever challenged, is broken.

Salvation comes through the event of the cross. Always difficult to express what salvation really means. What does it mean to ‘be saved’? There is a story of an eminent Scottish theologian being approached by a very ardent Christian lady who asked the blunt question ‘Are you saved?’ To which he replied ‘Aye, madam. In the year 34AD’. I wish I could be so quick thinking and wise – though we also hear that God destroys the wisdom of the wise, so I shouldn’t be so eminent. I’ll stick with my own level of ignorance!

Interestingly though Paul does not speak of salvation in the sense of ‘one minute you are perishing, the next minute you are saved’, but rather we are ‘being saved’. So there is the event on the cross – the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus offered once, ***εφάπαξ****,* which then invites us into its mystery, to live and seek, to breath and act, to have our being and to develop faith continually. We are ‘being saved’ by this all embracing action of Christ, the Word made flesh, Christ, the word of the cross.

‘For Jews demand signs’ says Paul, ‘and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles’. The word from the cross is that both Jews and Greeks are as one in the saving act of the cross. There is no distinction, no difference.

The sign is plain to see – there is no need of further evidence. It is the cross. The sign is plain to see – there is no need for clever philosophical argumentation. It is the cross. God does not try to outwit the wisdom of the world, he simply turns it upside down. The glory of God is manifested through the cross.

It is some Greeks who ask the Apostle Philip if they can see Jesus. He takes the request through the Apostle, the ‘first –called’ Andrew. They are all in Jerusalem for the week-long Passover festival. The crowds in the city will be even more metropolitan that usual. All sorts will be there from many different ethnic backgrounds.

This episode allows us to explore just a little further the phrase ‘Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom’.

Immediately prior to the gospel reading today we have mention of Lazarus – we thought a little about Lazarus on Sunday and yesterday. The raising of Lazarus was a sign as clear as the nose on your face. Many of the residents of Bethany and Jerusalem would have heard that Jesus had raised someone from the dead. That is quite a thing! Here is clear evidence of the power of God in Jesus. Many are beginning to gather round and follow Jesus and his company, including a raised Lazarus. What greater evidence, proof, could you ask for?

The inquisitive Greeks may have been expecting some fine philosopher as they request to see Jesus – someone whose words are worth hanging upon, maybe in the style of Aristotle, or Plato, or Pythagoras. This is not what Jesus says in response to the request. It may be a lovely agricultural image – the grain of wheat in the ground, dying so that it might live and grow and bear fruit. But Jesus is not a seed-merchant. He is talking plainly about us having to die in order that we might. He makes allusions to his own death. What sort of wisdom is this – it is sheer folly. Who would follow someone whose message is framed in these words and images.

I wonder what we now demand and desire. Is it signs or is it wisdom? Or what is it? If it is signs we look for our world and our culture is overwhelmed with them – images that are global for fashion, celebrity, this or that globally essential commodity or item to possess; icons, not painted on wood to be part of our piety, and a gateway into the divine presence; but icons to an eternity of Apps and means of communication. If it is wisdom we seek, where can we look for it, and how do we authenticate it as genuine wisdom that is life asserting and life-giving in a world where truth is relativized, and in fact debunked because politicians and leaders so bewilder us with truth being fake, and fake being promoted as truth.

The answer will never change for Christians – it is the cross. We don’t own it however, nor do we have a monopoly on it by our church rules and regulations. For the cross is life-giving to all who seek God through its mystery.

**Time of silent stillness**

**Blessing:**

Christ crucified draw you to himself, to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven: and the blessing….