

# For what will it profit them...

## *... to gain the whole world, but forfeit their soul*

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*A sermon given on the on the Second Sunday of Lent, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021, by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in the Attended Communion Service.*

*Mark 8:31=end*

Just before today's gospel reading, Peter, one of Jesus's closest disciples, had confidently identified and declared that Jesus was the Messiah. And I imagine that he was full of hope for a healthier and fairer future. Surely being with the Messiah would mean success, being on the winning side, disrupting the ruling powers, a quick fix to being part of the new regime.

Because following any religious freedom leader would have carried risk and they would have known that: we'd just heard what had happened to John the Baptist and countless others. But knowing your religious leader was the messiah raised your chances of survival significantly. Peter, along with the others, would have expectations racing and were eagerly awaiting to hear the plan for victory. Then Jesus spoke, "The son of man must undergo great sufferings and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be killed. And after three days rise again." I imagine Peter felt a little bit like 'How is this happening? This was not the plan. This isn't what messiahs do. How can it be going so badly wrong? This is no quick fix to victory.'

Peter had the extra humiliation of a direct rebuke from Jesus following his angry reaction to his words. Peter was desperately trying to control the situation to try and steer it in the direction he knew it should be going. And from a human perspective, he was right. But as Jesus pointed out, there was another dimension to what was going on, a dimension that the disciples wouldn't understand for a long time to come, even as they walked with Jesus and experienced his prophetic words come to pass.

Jesus understood that his true heavenly purpose was to defeat power, but not in human terms. He was set to defeat the very powers of evil at work in the human structures that lead to suffering, rejection, violent acts, jealousies, deceptions, coercive behaviours and systemic injustice. His purpose took him on a journey to the very heart of love, which is the cross. But this journey is not for Jesus alone. Jesus calls the whole crowd to join his disciples, drawing them and us into his radical subversion and understanding of political power: "If anyone wants to become my follower, let them deny themselves, take up their

cross and follow me." To follow Jesus is to share his journey. And as Tim said last week, it's a journey of contrasts; of mountaintops and the wilderness; of singing Hosanna and weeping with Mary; of confronting injustice and evil with love that may cost very lives.

Maximilian Kolbe was born in 1894. He was a Catholic priest and a Franciscan friar. As a child he received a vision of the Virgin Mary holding two crowns, one white for purity and one red for martyrdom, and heard her asking if he would accept either of them, to which he said he would accept both. Following an academic and missionary life, he was taken to Auschwitz in 1941, where he endured the beatings, lashings and tortures of the prisoner of war camp, but he continued to minister to all those around him. At the end of July 1941, a prisoner escaped, which prompts the deputy camp commander to pick 10 men to be starved to death as an example to prevent others from doing the same. One of the selected men cried out in anguish, "My wife, my children." At which Kolbe offered to take his place, and his offer was accepted. Kolbe let the other nine prisoners and himself in prayer daily for two weeks - two weeks of not being fed - at the end of which he was the only one still alive. He was killed by lethal injection on the 14th of August 1941.

Few of us, I hope, will be called to follow Jesus in such an extreme manner, but I have a friend, Annie, who is the priest, in fact, the same priest who married Tom and me seven years ago this week, and she felt God call her from London to South Africa about six years ago. But she has become more and more involved in social justice.

She works for an organisation called 'More than Peace' which seeks to stand in the gap in situations such as public meetings or protests, where inter-generational causes and consequences of systemic injustice and unequal access to resources, power and basic services are being voiced and accountability is being sought by citizens. 'More than Peace' trains impartial observers to support interactions and dynamics between all present, whether citizens, politicians, government officials, state security or public private role-players. Annie has found herself at the end of a gun on more than one occasion. And she faces violent threats daily - "Take up your cross and follow me."

We can sit here in comfortable Beverley, but there are sadly few places in our world where injustice isn't found. We only have to visit our local supermarket. Over 40 million people are trapped in slavery right now in our world, often in forced labour, their enslavement enables us to enjoy low-price chocolate, coffee, phones, rice, clothes, jewellery and many other taken-for-granted goods. The work of slaves generates one hundred and fifty billion dollars a year to line other people's pockets - slaves we can inadvertently keep in slavery,

out of ignorance and our enthusiasm for a bargain. If you're listening to this and thinking, 'I don't know where to start in following Jesus on the path of justice', then you could well begin with the International Justice Mission's Lent campaign to make 'slave-free' normal. They've produced a series of videos which lead to practical suggestions of simple changes in how we shop and how we can use our voice to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves.

It's also Fair Trade Fortnight, so perhaps even just to make one simple change would be to swap one of your everyday goods for a fairly-traded one, which ensures that the money for it goes to the people who produced it: a great way to start shopping slave-free. It's a journey that will cost us time and effort and money. I began researching and ended up down deep, deep rabbit warrens and have committed to spend more time reading and learning and changing. One that will cost us beyond Lent if that change is going to be maintained.

"For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Following Jesus is a journey, not just to the cross, but on to the resurrection. Let us be people who bring resurrection to others in every way we can. The gift of freedom. And the ultimate gift of love. Our final hymn, which we will hear shortly, ends with these words.

*Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*

# Reading Text

Mark 8:31-end

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." <sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."