

Passion Sunday Thought 29th March 2020 – Matt 26, Rev 22:1-5

'If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.' Perhaps one of the great lines of scripture, and one which has inspired so many of us to put our trust in Jesus. For here we see both the **humanity** of Jesus, as he wrestles agonisingly with the trial that awaits him, and feels what we all feel in difficult times – fear, anxiety, sadness. But we also see the **obedience** of Jesus, as he faces his worst fears, overcomes them and chooses the path which God has planned for him.

Probably each of us at times in our lives faces a Gethsemane moment: a time when we know God is calling us to something challenging, but it is something we'd rather not experience, a fire we'd rather not walk through. Perhaps too in these unique times, and with the challenges currently facing our world, we may even have cried out this week something similar to the words of Jesus: 'may this cup be taken from us.'

There is one big difference between our situation and Jesus': I'm not suggesting for a moment that the Coronavirus is somehow God's will. But we also know that even in the midst of evil and darkness God in his great goodness and grace is able to bring light out of it. And in these dark times, I've seen so much light: in the many stories of generosity and sacrifice, in the faces of those who put themselves at risk every day to serve others; in the million or more volunteers who want to change this country for the better; in the way fragmented communities are pulling together with a sense of purpose we've not seen for decades in this nation.

As a nation we're being shaken – but we're also being stirred; we're recovering a sense of who we are, who we're meant to be. Words like 'community' and 'neighbour', which we've mostly taken for granted and used as empty platitudes, are now real things: things of light and strength and peace in the chaos. And if the kingdom of God can be measured by the amount of blessing or service or selflessness you see in a society, then we can look around us and say that, strange as it may sound, *the kingdom of God is actually growing at the moment* – unnoticed, unheralded, like a mustard seed whose branches are now reaching everywhere.

My sense is that in this season people are also looking to connect with the deep things of life again: things that are timeless, unshakeable, rooted in something bigger than themselves. When we return to Scripture we see just this sense of rootedness. It was this rootedness in God's love that enabled Jesus to overcome his greatest trial and win our freedom. And that same rootedness will see us through as well.

And the Lamb we see here being arrested and led to his end is the same Lamb we find in the last chapter of the bible, ruling the universe. As we bring our series on the story of Scripture to an end today, we return to that **very simple truth which fills our hearts with hope: Jesus wins**. The sorrow, the sickness, the darkness and death of this world is defeated and one day there will be only light, only peace, only life eternal.

And notice that we get to play a full part that. Heaven is not playing a harp on a cloud, heaven is vibrant community. Just look at the promises: **we get to see Jesus** (v4). What we seize by faith now will be visible reality then. **We get to serve Jesus** (v3). The selfless love of the servant king now infuses all our actions. And **we get to reign with Jesus** (v5). It's quite hard to imagine, but like Moses, all Jesus' followers are part of the royal family now – you are all princesses and princes, children of the King – and one day you will exercise that authority on his behalf, just as you were meant to.

The story of scripture starts in Eden and ends in Paradise. *In between we walk through the 'valley of the shadow of death' – but that is not our destiny and it is not the end of the story.* This current chapter is a difficult one to read, but take heart: it is not the last chapter, for you or for our world.

And while this chapter contains many tear-stained faces and anxious hearts, let us summon our courage to believe that one day God himself will be our light, and so we can say, today, and in this season: 'Yet not my will, but yours be done.' Amen.