

28th August 2020

Dear Friends,

Well here we are at the end of August, being treated to wind and rain, summer seems to have slipped past us, though I must admit that I am hoping for a break in the rain and at least a chance of a few days or weeks more of sun and warmth, not least because I was starting to enjoy meeting people in my garden (socially distanced of course). That said we keep on keeping on don't we, we keep taking in new guidelines, we follow the rules about distancing, wearing masks, washing our hands, we do so for ourselves, but also for others, those who are more vulnerable among us, it remains and will do for sometime the caring thing to do.

Of course, what the caring thing to do is, should be a part of what we ask ourselves day by day, are our actions and attitudes Christ-like? Then of course being Christ-like can be costly, as we are reminded in the preamble to our Covenant prayer, sometimes God calls us to those things that suit our natural inclinations, and sometimes not, sometimes we are called to the sacrificial path, and to the laying down or aside of our desires in order to follow Christ and to love our neighbour, to follow Christ we make choices every day, and often moment by moment.

As we make those choices we remember that Jesus too made choices, he followed the path laid out before him even through the struggle in Gethsemane, the trial and the crucifixion before coming through to the resurrection, and even then in the garden, in the upper room behind locked doors and now into eternity he bears those scars. This week's Gospel reading points us to Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, explain to the disciples that there is suffering to come for him, and a deep challenge for them, he invites them to follow his path saying:

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

(Matthew 16: 24-26)

We are called to examine our priorities and our way of living and being, The Message version puts it like this:

Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?

In following me Jesus says you will find your true self, your child of God self, your called, named, included in Christ self, and the truth is we are all included, it is just that sometimes we have to turn away from things that demand our attention, even from seemingly good things!

My favourite line in the story of the Lost Son, is the point where having spent everything, in a far away land and feeding pigs "he came to himself", he saw and understood who he was, and it grieved him, it is at that point that he chooses to return to his Father's house. His intention is to return as a servant, to earn his place, but of course that is not how the story goes, he is welcomed and celebrated, and that is how it is for each of us, we are welcomed and celebrated known and loved, even in these anxious times, and there is a wonderful freedom in that.

There is a wonderful freedom in that that enables us not to live for ourselves but to live for Christ, to take our place in the family of God where there is room for all! There is room for all, and perhaps that is where we sometimes stumble, for if we are "in", then surely others must be "out" because they are not as we are, but that is not how God works, he accepts the rich and poor alike, the outcast and the insider, no matter

what our race we are accepted, no matter what our gender or sexuality we are accepted, no matter what we have done, remember the thief on the cross was to be welcomed into paradise! Of course, all of this can be rather hard for us to swallow, when we don't like someone's politics, or attitude, when we are rubbed up the wrong way by something that is said it is easy to judge, but we are not called to judge, we are called to follow, and to serve one another in love. So we pray for those who persecute us, and that is not easy, and we pray for those we find it hard to include, and that is not easy, but perhaps in doing so we find our true selves, hidden in Christ with God!

So, as we walk through these days into September, as children return to school, and some return to working in offices instead of at home, as restrictions are reviewed and revised frequently and we still move through strange times let us dare to do so as Christ-followers, discerning the loving path, the way of sacrifice of self, as we follow the guidelines laid down and seek the move of the Spirit amongst us.

I leave you with this hymn:

*From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.*

This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.

*There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.*

This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.

*Come, see his hands and his feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.*

This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.

*So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.*

This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.

Let us bring our lives as a daily offering, trusting God to take and shape us, and lead us on.

Once again, if you would like to talk to me, I am available, you remain in my prayers

With love

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Reverend Sally Coleman 01142664637