

The readings today are quite challenging.

The reading from Isaiah is the song of the unfruitful vine.

The overall message is that God's expectations are not met by his people.

*For, Isaiah writes, he expected justice from his people but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!*

The psalm is a communal lament which prays for Israel's restoration.

And in the confronting words from Jesus in the gospel about bringing fire and division to the world particularly in family life, we may well feel that we have lost sight of the Jesus that we know and love - the Jesus that makes us feel good - yet perhaps when we look a little more closely at the way of Jesus in our lives, we can see that our experience in him is not valued because it feels good, it is valued because it is real and because we can trust in its reality even when we cannot feel it.

This, in a nutshell is what faith is as a Christian I believe.

Trusting in the fact that the way of Christ is there for us continually even when it is hard to feel or see any evidence of it.

In the overall teachings of the gospels, Jesus uses invitational and evocative forms of speech to challenge the complacency of well ingrained conventional ways of seeing and living, and to invite his followers to an alternative way of life.

In his ministry Jesus continually brings out into the open the foibles of the central values of his social world's conventional wisdom. He regularly attacks the integral value that people place upon wealth and worldly honour and purity, and the religiosity of the day. All of these are sanctified by tradition, and their importance is part of the taken-for-granted world.

New Testament scholar, Marcus Borg observes that as a teacher of the love and wisdom of God, Jesus was not primarily a teacher of information - about what to believe- or morals, about how to behave, but a teacher of a way or path of transformation. We may well ask - a way of transformation from what to what? One response to this is, from a life in the world of conventional wisdom to a life centred in God. <sup>1</sup>

In the gospel today Jesus words "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" express that the nature of his message is to purify and to enable people, personally and corporately, to distinguish falseness from truth or rubbish from the genuine product and ultimately to become whole through their dependence upon a life centred in God.

Now as we can imagine, the consequences of such a ministry are bound to rock the boat -to cause disturbance and division in every age of time. For some will accept his authority and his uncompromising message to become centred in God, and others will challenge his authority on every front especially in family structures in which people can sometimes claim a certain type of ownership of one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Fox, *Christian Mystics* New World Library, California: 2011. Included passage by Marcus J. Borg p15

This alternative way of life in Christ can therefore be one that divides families - three against two and two against three – father against son and son against father mother against daughter and daughter against mother...brother against brother.

Yet peace for the sake of it, will not be obtained at any cost, especially at the cost of compromising God's way of the kingdom. *"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division"*.

With such a mission ahead of him Jesus yearns for the baptism that he has to endure to fulfil his ministry. In this context his baptism is not the rite of baptism as we know it, but the way of the cross and even though it is far from an attractive prospect Jesus, longs for it to come. *"I have a baptism with which to be baptised and what stress I am under until it is completed."*

He also makes it known that the crowds, because of their hypocrisy refuse to see God's key moment of salvation history present in Jesus kingdom ministry. Yet ironically, they can read the signs of nature in the weather, and they have sufficient intelligence in legal matters, to seek reconciliation and freedom from imprisonment. If only they would apply that ingenuity to reading the signs of the time in Jesus.

Now as we know, the crowd's inaptitude does not stop Jesus from completing his mission. He goes on his journey to Jerusalem in obedience to God's Will, resolutely facing all opposition and completing his mission.

The outcomes for human kind are limitless. What is won and offered is oneness with God each other and creation.

God's expectations are met in the humanity of Jesus. The words of Isaiah are fulfilled. The separateness within the world, is overcome by him.

**And his Spirit is with us.**

Now our hope lies totally in this reality. And as such, we continue on our journey of change and growth centred in God.

So we might well ask, what is it that keeps us resolutely on this journey?

Well it may be many things. Perhaps the promises of steadfast love, forgiveness and companionship or the promise of eternal life.

Yet overall, I believe, it is simply our faith. For it is in faith that we can accept that our transformation doesn't happen overnight – that it is a process that we can trust in – yes we make mistakes – but we keep going – remaining open to our change – deepening our relationship with God and depending upon it in prayer as we go - looking to the Spirit in our lives to lead us.

As people of faith we live by the powerful conviction as did the saints and martyrs who have gone before us – that the reality of the world lives in the promises of God in Christ and not by our voices or whims. And as St Paul tells us in the epistle - *we run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, to lead us.*

The Lord be with you.