

Sermon – 2nd Sunday of Lent – 28th February 2021

Who said it would be easy!

Life is too short to wake up with regrets.

So, love the people who treat you right.

Forget about those who don't.

Believe everything happens for a reason.

If you get a chance, take it.

If it changes your life, let it.

Nobody said life would be easy,

They just promised it would most likely be worth it!

A short poem from Paulo Coelho.

Life is full of ups and downs.

Of challenges that come our way.

I am sure you can all think of something which has proved challenging in your lives.

When I look back to my last three years of teaching. Alongside my highly demanding job I was part time training on a Ministry and Mission course to reach where I am today. My evenings were spent reading, writing, or attending

college. School holidays just didn't happen as I spent my time at my computer writing assignments. And then, to add to all the stress, there were the occasional weekends to Crewe to study. There was definitely nothing part time about this course. Of course, there were many times when all I wanted to do was give it up! And to this day I have NO idea how I managed to complete it. But the support I received from my family, my friends, and those who I studied alongside were just what was needed at that time.

Perhaps as Paulo Coelho wrote – it was most likely worth it!

Who said it would be easy!

In the Gospel today we hear what must have been a shock to the disciples. For the past 3 years, since they were asked by Jesus to Come and Follow him, they had devoted their lives to listening to his teaching, watching his miracles, following wherever Jesus led them.

It had all been going so well.

And now they hear that it is necessary for Jesus to suffer. To be killed.

It is no wonder that Peter takes Jesus aside to tell him that it cannot be true.

Peter realising that this could be an embarrassing conversation to have with Jesus. And not wanting to put him on the spot in front of the other disciples. Takes Jesus aside to disagree privately.

But the events that happen next must struck a nerve with Peter.

Jesus turns and looks at his disciples.

He physically turns away from Peter before he speaks.

That one action alone must have hurt Peter.

Yet, Jesus turns away from him and shares the rebuke with the other disciples.

“Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things.”

Then turning to the crowds, Jesus speaks the essence of His message,

‘If any want to become my followers,

deny yourselves

take up your cross

and **follow me.**’

3 things to do!

Who said it would be easy!

If we think of the last twelve months and lockdown,

Firstly, who would have predicted it?

And secondly, who would have said that lockdown would be easy?

We started in glorious sunshine.

We all became aware of social distancing.

Hands, face, space became the daily mantra.

We learned new skills to keep in touch.

But as the days passed.

The loneliness began to sink in.

The loss from no human contact with others, was felt.

The grief from the daily death tolls that kept rising.

Our fears for the future taking over.

Loss, grief, fear, and loneliness.

Yet the alternative to living with the regulations set out was for us to inadvertently infect someone else with the virus.

**The last year has not been to do with what is easiest for ourselves,
but rather trying to keep others safe.**

Putting love into action!

And this 'love into action' has been seen throughout the Pandemic, in many community schemes. Ensuring...

- people are fed,
- children are clothed.

- Providing debt advice to people losing their jobs,
- shopping for people who are isolated.
- Making that essential phone call which means so much to the recipient.

Amongst many more, which I could mention.

Volunteers putting others before themselves.

Giving much needed support to where it is needed.

Support which will be crucial as we look to coming out of lockdown.

As restrictions are gradually lifted.

As people are helped to reintegrate into a post-pandemic world.

Where the easing of lockdown brings longed-for opportunities; -

to see friends, play sports, resume contact with family in a 'real space' or get back to work that we value.

Corona virus anxiety will be present within many of us, for many days and weeks to come.

How can we put 'love into action?'

The effects of the pandemic will be felt for a long time to come.

There will be many challenges which lie ahead.

Questions to be asked and tackled.

About free school meals, especially in holiday times.

With greater unemployment, Universal credit, and the delays in it starting.

The homeless people on our streets.

People with disabilities refused PIP payments,

Refugees and asylum seekers turned away, made to feel unwelcome.

I wonder what we can do.

Because deep in our hearts, we all know that we need to notice others' needs.

We are called to follow God's way, not our own desires.

We are asked to **deny ourselves, take up our cross, and to follow.**

This is what Jesus' life proves to us all.

The alternative is worse.

- Not confronting and defeating evil.
- Not noticing others' needs.
- Not responding if it is inconvenient.

When I began to write this sermon. I thought the Gospel reading was too harsh, to grim for this time, this year, after a yearlong lockdown.

BUT, after praying with it.

Reflecting on it.

I feel it is a reading which should speak loudly into our lives today.

It is hard, but so relevant.

I'll end with the serenity prayer from Reinhold Niebuhr: -

*“Lord, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

Jesus said.

Deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow me.

Lent is the time for new challenges and new beginnings.

Nobody ever said it would be easy!

Amen.