

Sermon Lent 2 28 February 2021 (Genesis 17.1-7, 15-16 & Mark 8.31-end)

I always like to hear of Simon Peter! Here he is in today's Gospel, putting his foot in it again; relatable as ever! Of course, there are special interests here too: at Holy Trinity we have Peter as co-patron and for most clergy these days, we were ordained at Petertide, on or near Peter's feast day of 29 June. But this takes on a particular meaning for all of us in the Team this year as we start to look forward in 2021...to the ordination of our own as it were Simon Peter; Simon Asquith, our curate-designate, on 26 June, God-willing.

These ruminations also bubble up within me this week as we have had three Ember Days; "oh yes, Ember Days", I hear you say or maybe more reasonably you ask, "what are those?" Well, I'd like to be reminded too, so from our Daily Prayer book:

Ember Days

Ember Days should be kept, under the bishop's directions, in the week before an ordination as days of prayer for those to be made deacon or priest.

Ember Days may also be kept even when there is no ordination in the diocese as more general days of prayer for those who serve the Church in its various ministries, both ordained and lay, and for vocations.

Traditionally they have been observed on the Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays within the weeks before the Third Sunday of Advent, the Second Sunday of Lent and the Sundays nearest to 29 June and 29 September.

There you have it! Petertide for Simon this year; but also this week just gone, which is perhaps especially resonant since we have not long had Ash Wednesday. Had we been in church, you would have had ashes sprinkled over your heads; rather like the biblical image of sackcloth, ashes and fasting which lies behind our latter-day Ember Day. Well, this is all sounding appropriately Lenten isn't it; in which case (as the Ember Day rubric says) it is about all of us – "general days of prayer for ministry and vocation". What, then, might be the message or the content of such prayer and God's response? It's a tough one, the one that gets Simon Peter a rebuke: Jesus' way is suffering, death and resurrection; such will be the way of His disciples; 'if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'

This might be harder than ever, a year into the pandemic and lockdown; give us a break! Well, the breaking of the dawn is on the horizon now, praise be! And yet, it is Lent, it is the time of the Christian year when the essence of the Gospel is re-enacted; it's that way again – suffering, death and resurrection. I think we know this to be true; that the Cross is at the heart of our lives; that we are the bearers of hope precisely because we know suffering, we face suffering, we stand in the strength of the Cross of Christ, and that alone.

And God, for His part, is faithful: He made the covenant with Abraham and His descendants (us) for ever. First, he gave Abram a new name; that resonates with vocation and ministry: in some traditions, at confirmation, at ordination, at the taking of religious vows; but actually, for all of us, at baptism we are named. Let us, in these days, hear our name from God: it might be a new name or new identity or new purpose or task as we emerge out of this crisis; it might be a renewed resolve to continue along the identity and path already set.

Later this year, I pray that we will be inspired by the vocation and ministry of our own Simon; that in turn it will lead to each of us hearing afresh from God His call on our lives, His calling of our name, His promise to us, His assistance in carrying the particular cross we may be called to bear.

Amen.