

SERMON – 10/3/19**The Way of the Cross: Jesus Wept**

Luke 9:41-48

“Jesus came closer to the city and when He saw it He wept over it.”
(Luke 19:41)

Today we begin the journey towards Good Friday and the Cross and onward to Easter and the empty tomb, and over the course of these next weeks we will be turning to the pages of Luke's account of the last week of Jesus' earthly life and ministry to reflect on what some of the events that took place that week have to say to us on our journey and to listen for God's call to us at this particular time in our lives, that we may each more faithfully follow Christ.

You will be well aware that each of the four Gospels has a slightly different take on the story of Jesus and while overall the same tale is told and many of the same episodes are recounted, they are told in a slightly different accent which allows us to hear things in a different way from each of them. One of the big themes in Dr Luke's account which is the one we will be reading this year, apart from a particular interest in things medical, is the conscious emphasis on the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Ten out of 24 chapters – from 9 to 19 – highlight Jesus' focus on His ultimate destination. In 9:51 Luke tells us that 'Jesus made up His mind and set out on His way to Jerusalem.' In ch.13 the Lord tells some Pharisees, 'I must be on my way today, tomorrow and the next day; it is not right for a prophet to be killed anywhere except in Jerusalem' and He goes on 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how many times have I wanted to put my arms round all your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me!' (Luke 13:33-34) Earlier in the chapter from which we have read this morning, Luke tells us that Jesus 'went on into Jericho and was passing through.' (Luke 19:1)

In today's reading which follows on immediately from the account of Jesus' triumphant approach to the city on what we call Palm Sunday, we read in the words of our text: “Jesus came closer to the city and when He saw it He wept over it.” (Luke 19:41) Ten chapters worth of anticipation and expectation of His arrival at His destination and when He sees the city (which He has visited before) His reaction is to weep. But these are not

tears of relief, I don't think. They are tears of yearning and tears of grief, and they are tears that speak to us as we face many different challenges in life.

My prayer for these coming weeks is that what we think about as we read the account of Jesus' last tumultuous week on earth in our human flesh may make a connection and build a bridge that is firmly grounded on the one side in God's Word and on the other side in the realities of the here and now. I want to begin this morning by describing four scenarios in which people find themselves. They are *not* real situations, although they *could* be, and I would very much encourage you to consider people who come to mind as I describe them. It may be that one or more of them describe your own situation or that of someone close to you. Listen out for what God may be saying.

The first scenario is one where there is no peace. How many people live without peace? There are those, thankfully not those we know personally, who today have no peace because they are living in a war zone, fearful of what each new day may bring in terms of danger for themselves and their families. But we may know people who have no peace for other reasons – they are people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs and as a result they are not at peace, because physically, mentally and emotionally they are craving something that leads them to look for satisfaction in another fix; they are people who are suffering domestic abuse – physical or sexual or psychological – and they have no peace because they are living under the threat of words or actions that will never allow them to rest; they are people who are suffering from past trauma that wakes them still in the night bathed in sweat, or from the turmoil of mental illness that messes with their thinking, or from a crushing loneliness that haunts their waking and wakeful moments.

Jesus wept when He saw Jerusalem and this is why: He said, 'If you only knew today what is needed for peace! But now you cannot see it!' (v.42) When people have no peace, they think that peace will come with the sorting of the immediate problem – the next fix, an end to the present threat, the arrival of a friend at the door. Jesus weeps today for those who have no peace because too often we cannot see that He alone is the One who brings deep and lasting peace by reconciling us to God through His own body given up for us on the Cross.

The second scenario is one where there is no future. How many people do we know who are struggling because they feel that the future has been taken away from them or that the future they thought they were going to enjoy has been demolished. Every day people are facing the devastation caused by bereavement: the death of a loved one they assumed would be part of their future, the diagnosis of a terminal illness that will rob them of a future they expected to have, the breakdown of a family unit that they thought would be their lasting network, the loss of a job that they were banking on being there until retirement.

Jesus wept when He saw Jerusalem, and His tears drove Him to prophesy: 'The time will come when your enemies will surround you with barricades, blockade you and close in on you from every side. They will completely destroy you and the people within your walls; not a single stone will they leave in its place, because you did not recognise the time when God came to save you.' (v.43-44) Within a generation, Jerusalem would be razed to the ground, the Temple reduced to nothing more than a few foundation stones, known to us today as the Wailing Wall, where nearly 2000 years on the Jewish people still mourn the destruction of the place which symbolised God's presence on earth. For the people of Israel in the 1st century the future was taken away at least in the form they were expecting it because, Jesus said, they had not recognised the coming of the Saviour. And Jesus weeps today for those of us who will not recognise or receive the salvation He offers which offers a better future than we could ever have imagined, even in the face of losing everything we thought mattered.

The third scenario is one where there is no prayer. We live in a society that has rejected and continues to reject the Christian heritage of our nation. Secularism advances under the guise of benign and neutral rationalism, materialism sets the agenda and worshippers flock to the temples of Mammon that govern the all-important economy, even the Church is witnessing the conscious abandonment of living faith in favour of a nominal adherence to empty traditions.

Jesus wept when He entered the Temple in Jerusalem and saw the marketplace it had become, and His tears drove Him to action, overturning the tables and driving out the merchants. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, burned with righteous anger and gave the nominal religionists of His day a tongue-lashing: 'God said, "My Temple will be called a house of prayer" but you

have turned it into a hideout for thieves!' (v.46) And Jesus weeps today for those who are attempting to by-pass the Maker's intentions by living life without relating to Him. Just because we display an outward form of godliness by being here this morning does not guarantee that we will escape the sharpness of Jesus' words if we are denying the power of prayer by our attitude to it and to the One to whom it is addressed.

Because the final scenario is one where there is no Jesus. We live in a society that has not only turned its back on the outward expressions of faith – involvement in the Church, adherence to the moral standards of the Christian tradition and an honouring of the Word of God as the supreme rule of faith and life – but has comprehensively dismissed the One who is its author, its Head, its enabler – Jesus Himself.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem where the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the leaders of the people were wanting to kill Him, knowing that before the week was out they would have got their way. Yet at this stage in the week, the crowds appeared to be on His side, holding the authorities back from the final solution because, as Luke tells us, they were 'listening to Him, not wanting to miss a single word.' (v.48) The single most important question for us as we begin this Lenten journey is whether we are on the Lord's side, listening avidly and not wanting to miss what He would say to us at this time, or whether in reality we are already living a life where there is no Jesus.

Jesus weeps over us, loving us and yearning that we may enter into life, the life He gave for us; His heart breaks when we are estranged from Him, when (for whatever reason) we are living where He is not known, where the voice of prayer is silent, where there is no future, no peace; and He calls us to come with Him the way of the cross, that we may also rise with Him to life eternal, the life that has its beginning by faith here and now. Wherever you find yourself at this time, whatever struggles you are facing, however the tides and currents of this world may be threatening you, look up and look ahead. In Christ we have a destination, in Christ we have a purpose, in Christ we have a companion on the way. Where Christ is, there is access to the Father in prayer; where Christ is there is a future; where Christ is, there is peace. And there will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain.