



# Sunday Reflection

## Season of Lent

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 28 February 2021

# Lent 2

The liturgies of Lent draw us towards the cross, Christ's sacrifice on behalf of all creation. The disciplines of Lent lead us into both trusting the mystery of Christ's death and accepting the costly responsibility of continuing his work in the world.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."** Mark 8:31

### An Illustration to set the scene

**Pantomime** is a form of musical comedy popular in Great Britain. Often based on the retelling of well-known fairy tales, it relies on stock characters and situations, as well as audience participation.

One of the staple tropes involves a villain lurking menacingly, visible to the audience but unseen by the hero or heroine on stage.

The audience cries out "Behind you!", the hero or heroine pretends not to hear, the shouting persists and eventually she or he turns around, just as the villain ducks out of sight.

This is repeated several times, with increasingly excited shouting. Audience and hero develop a strong rapport, although an element of trust is still missing as long as the villain is "Behind you!"

In this form of theatre actors often address the audience directly, which is known as "breaking the fourth wall". It boosts the audience's investment in the drama, drawing them in to become participants in the action.

### **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

At just about the central point of Mark's Gospel, (in the verses immediately preceding today's lectionary reading,) Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah.

Next, in swift succession, three times Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection, and each time the Gospel immediately goes on to record behaviour by the disciples that demonstrates how far they have misunderstood his meaning.

Jesus counters Peter's messianic pronouncement by explaining how that messiahship would play out – death, three days, new life.

In response, Peter vehemently remonstrates with his Lord, arguing that this was not how God was perceived to work, only to be sharply reprimanded by Jesus.

Peter is like the hero in the pantomime, with Jesus as the audience telling him a truth that the apostle cannot believe, having not seen it for himself.

But then Jesus' closing remarks are strikingly revealing – Peter is not focused on God's ways, but on human ones.

Peter might have objected that contemporary readings of scripture painted the Messiah as a triumphant warrior who would release his people from Roman tyranny and restore the independent kingdom of Israel.

That was the divine way as far as he was concerned. A brutal, ignominious criminal's death would have seemed to be a far too human failure.

Peter was forgetting the example of Abraham, however, as heard in our first reading.

The ways in which God fulfils divine promises are not subject to the rules, values and cultural expectations of human beings.

Or, as Paul demonstrates in our reading from Romans, God's grace trumps human logic.

Paul also reminds his readers that Abraham has faith in God; he trusts that, despite his advanced years and Sarah's barrenness, God will accomplish the promises offered and make him the father of a nation.

Paul calls us to have such faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Jesus himself, when addressing both the disciples and the wider crowd in the closing verses of our Gospel reading, also urges an abiding trust in God's ways.

The serious sacrifice of the cross is also to be carried out into the world by Jesus' followers; it is trust made manifest.

The Gospel mandates that we place God's love for all above our own needs, and in committing to following it we rightly set divine over human things.

## How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

In pantomime the back-and-forth banter between stage and auditorium creates a relationship between the characters and the audience that is integral to the performance, but which relies on misunderstanding for comic and dramatic effect.

The relationship of Peter and the disciples with Jesus is, at this stage in the Gospel, still fraught with "misheard" messages.

Peter is so preoccupied with the immediate needs of his people that he can only see the solution in human terms, unlike Abraham whose faith allowed him to trust that God would fulfil promises made on God's terms, not ours.

The sweep of scripture through Old and New Testaments reminds us to see beyond a single spotlight moment, and to trust in the breadth of God's plan for all creation.

Putting that trust into action has sacrificial implications for all of us; following the cross means living a life focused upon God's vision and not our own.

**"Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."** Mark 8:31

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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