



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

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



For Sunday 26 June 2022

Pentecost 3

Today is a day for looking forward, inspired by God's vision for our lives, not clinging to the past through fear or a desire to recreate old situations. So let us embrace the future.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62

An Illustration to set the scene

Ploughing has never been easy.

Farmers turn over furrows – strips of ground about twelve inches wide and eight inches deep.

In ploughing competitions the aim is to plough in as straight and even a line as possible, and some competitors stop and measure the furrow as they go.

With the advent of tractors the work is physically less demanding, but in some parts of the world a tractor is a luxury that is simply not affordable.

In Cuba, ploughing with oxen is common and in South Sudan ploughs are often pulled by people.

The South Sudan Rural Development Programme has published a document encouraging the use of oxen, describing its advantages over using human power – it saves human energy, is quicker and creates wider employment opportunities for activities such as ox-plough hire and transport.

Whatever method you use to move the plough, the task itself needs concentration and commitment to finish a field.

For those who plough using animal or human power it must require a great deal of stamina.

It would be understandable if the farmer gave up before the job was finished.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's Gospel Jesus uses the metaphor of the plough to explain his meaning.

First-century Palestinian farmers used oxen, with one hand on the plough and the other used to direct the animals.

If the farmer did not concentrate, looking forward, the furrows would be poor quality and the crops would not flourish.

Jesus' harsh-sounding statements in today's Gospel might make people question his caring credentials.

How could it be wrong to bury your father before setting off to follow Jesus? Surely it is inhumane to leave family and friends without saying goodbye and explaining where you are going?

This passage follows on from the story of the transfiguration, when Peter, James and John heard God's words: **"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"**

The story of the transfiguration is an echo of the story of Moses, his face shining, coming down from the mountain after talking with God.

The Israelites, having escaped Egypt, constantly looked back.

Instead of looking forward to the future and the good things that God had for them, they complained about their temporary circumstances, lost their vision of freedom, and began to see the slavery of the past as preferable.

Jesus is offering a transformation, but many of those who hear his teaching and see his miracles still lack the courage to look forward.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

There are many reasons for looking back or not sticking with something we have started.

Perhaps we reach a tough patch in a relationship or in learning a skill.

We begin to doubt that we are on the right track.

What seemed such a good idea when we began now seems wrong.

We interpret difficulty as a message that we didn't make the right choice in the first place, or we think we don't have the ability to keep going and reach the goal.

Another reason might be the desire to recreate the past which, through the lens of passing time, seems attractive – perhaps more attractive than it really was.

Unable to balance our good memories with an understanding that life is about change and the new, we want to hold on to something we had, even though holding on is impossible.

Most of us are not called to leave friends and family behind for a life of uncertainty.

For most of us the choices seem less dramatic. But if we lack courage, vision and determination we may miss the path that God wants us to follow.

Our contribution to the kingdom will be less than it could be and our lives less fulfilled.

Christ encourages us to move forward, ploughing a set of furrows that will provide a good environment for crops to flourish.

But to do so we need to look ahead, excited by the prospect of God's plans for us.

By prayer and meditation we can learn to become attuned to the voice of God, listening closely for signals telling us which path to take as we let go of the past and focus on today's furrow.

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