

Lent 2 Sunday 28 February 10 am at St. John's

Readings: Genesis 17.1-7; 15-16; Romans 4.13-end; Mark 8.31-end

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8.35)

There is a sense of cautious excitement this week about the proposed easing of lockdown restrictions!

But we are asked to stick to the rules. It is up to us to take personal responsibility.

Also in the news this week about 'taking personal responsibility':

Covid vaccinations – the Queen's comments – do it for the sake of others.
David Attenborough on climate change – His impassioned and urgent call to nations to take responsibility to avoid climate disaster. This is both a personal and a national responsibility

We are now in Lent. At this time, some choose to live by their own 'self-imposed' rules – a Lenten fast, to learn self-discipline and endurance - not just for its own sake, but in sympathy with Jesus who 'gave up human life' in human terms to fulfil his divine calling. In a paradoxical way, we are learning to take personal responsibility to 'lose' our life in order to follow Jesus.

In a similar vein, Abraham is asked by God to 'walk before me' (Gen. 17.1). So again, he is losing the life that perhaps he envisaged in order to walk in God's ways. It was his personal responsibility to choose to listen to God.

Of course, there are negative ways of 'losing our life', one of which was brought to my attention this week by the Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek. In the Bishop's Annual Lecture, she was talking about the 'Liedentity' campaign. This is her campaign to promote awareness amongst young people about the harmful effects of social media on their self-image. In a short video clip, we saw teenagers talking about the pressure from social media to portray themselves as someone other, not their true selves. In a negative way, they have 'lost their life'. Rachel's campaign helps them see that they are all made in God's image, unique, each one precious exactly as they are. I wonder how we, as adults, can help our children and grandchildren learn this message?

In our Lent discussion on Wednesday, we also touched on this idea of 'being ourselves.' This was in the context of Jesus call to all of us to share his story by

sharing our story with others in our everyday conversations. For each of us, our story is unique and the way we choose to explain it will be personal. As we heard each other's stories that night, all were different and equally valid. And I noticed that as we talked, we expressed confidence in 'being ourselves' in terms of how we interpret the word 'evangelism'. A word that often is off-putting because of misinterpretation about what being an evangelist is. One of the points made was in being ourselves, we trust that we are sharing Jesus by how we behave due to our Christian values; another was affirmed that by doing what he could do – delivering TRIO magazines, in which we share the message of our Christian faith in some of its content – he was being an evangelist.

So, back to the theme of personal responsibility and following Jesus. Our gospel today says,

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8.35)

What does this mean in practice for us?

The hymn words neatly explain what following Jesus will be like. They explain the **potential difficulties** – those things that we could find hard:

- You might end up doing things you didn't expect to do.
- You might be made to feel uncomfortable because you are upholding Christ-like values in situations that are 'hostile'. E.g. challenging injustice, workplace bullying, racial equality, peaceful resolution rather than antagonism.

They also give some examples of the **positive results** of living our lives following Jesus' example – in other words, being the body of Christ now.

- Caring for those in need, metaphorically helping the blind see, setting the prisoner free

And they also give us **encouragement and motivation** if we feel that the task is just too difficult for us.

- There is a personal invitation at the start of each line:

Will you come and follow me *if I but call your name*

The calling is to us personally – as the unique individuals that we are. We can be ourselves!

Verse 4 of the song especially emphasises this: *Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?* – this also speaks to the 'Liedentity' issue.

- We do not do it in our own strength – last line of each verse:

*will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?*

In other words, spiritually it is the life of Christ that is in us, guiding and giving strength by the Holy Spirit. We are never alone in this venture. We are given strength by the grace of God.

In terms of our personal responsibility, all that is required is for us to trust and have faith.

As we continue our journey through Lent, dare we risk saying yes to Jesus call and refreshing our commitment to lose our life for him and the sake of the gospel? AMEN

