

A Thought for Sunday 30th August

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity; Matthew 16: 21–28; Romans 12: 9–21

Of course Peter and the others were expecting a happy ending. After all, Jesus was the One, the Messiah. And being with him was great. So all this talk about suffering – well, it was unexpected, unsettling. Thoroughly bad form even. And Peter, being Peter, jumps straight in: “God forbid it Lord. This must never happen to you!”

The sharp manner in which Jesus responds highlights two contrasting sets of values – the worldly values which celebrate success, popularity and achievement, and the heavenly values which recognise the supremacy of unselfish, sacrificial love. Jesus himself knows that he has made himself vulnerable, that the path on which he is set – challenging the authorities and worldly values – will inevitably lead to a very nasty death for him. And, sad though it makes him, he knows those who follow him so closely are likely to have to endure terrible suffering too. There is a cost to discipleship, and both he and those who follow him need to be realistic about that. But love in its purest form is costly – who knows that better than the King of Love himself. And Love will conquer in the end.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul picks up the theme. He urges his readers to continue in love, even through great suffering; to be prepared to forgive and hand the fate of their enemies over to God. Above all, he urges them not to give up hope.

Sometimes we may seem out of kilter with the world. It is hard to make sense of what is happening all around us. But we are urged to continue loving God, to continue loving each other, to keep on working and hoping for the coming of the Kingdom, and to trust in God.

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