

## LENT 4

2 Chron 36:14-16; 10-23

Eph 2:4-10

Jn 3:14-21

Today is mid-Lent, a sort of half-term break from fasting before we up the ante and reflect on what God was doing in and through Jesus as he headed towards Jerusalem after his Transfiguration on the mountaintop.

Human beings are prone to adopting a 'them and us' view of the world while at the same time singing songs that affirm that 'we are many, but we are one.' With God there is no divisiveness. His creation and the peoples in it *are* one, so much so that he sent his only Son into the world, not to condemn the world but to save it through him. St John tells us that God loves the world despite it being inhabited by self-focussed human beings. We are not told that God *likes* it, but that he loves it, perhaps in the same way that parents love their crazy mixed up children while disliking many of their choices and how they live.

The story of the Children of Israel is an example of God's love and displeasure with them. God chose Israel to undertake the mission of drawing all the nations of the world to himself. He led them out of slavery through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In the wilderness the people whinged and virtually told God that they hated him as well as Moses his prophet. As life went on they stopped listening to God and behaved even more like spoiled little brats and in consequence they ended up in exile in Babylon, part of modern Iraq. But God never stopped loving them and when they realised they had acted like little idiots, God used Cyrus, king of Persia, part of modern Iran, who had crushed the Babylonian Empire to allow his people back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. God used a Gentile king to give his people a second chance.

God uses who he chooses to do his work because he loves all of his creation. However, his people Israel did not take this new opportunity to love him and follow his way, so God sent his only begotten Son to reveal his glory, speak his words and do his work. Jesus came as God's agent, to save the world not to condemn it. Some bibles use the word 'judge' rather than condemn, but judgement means separating truth from falsehood and good from evil. The word condemn is much more subtle because St John compares the coming of Jesus as the coming of light which usually ends in judgement because it shows everyone up for what we truly are.

Some people prefer darkness to light, rather like the creatures that live under a stone will scuttle away when the stone is lifted. They and some people cannot cope with light that exposes them. Confronted with the light of God's love revealed by Jesus, some people judge themselves and turn their backs on him, preferring to live in the darkness of their own shadow.

St John says that whoever lives by God's truth, or rather 'does' the truth by living it, will be saved. The truth of Jesus is not something that can be grasped by the human mind. It is something we have to hear, trust and obey with the whole of our being. St Paul assures us that it is God's love, his grace, that enables us to do this. It is only by 'doing' God's truth that we will come to know it.

We begin the second half of Lent, so perhaps we should use it to love the 'us' we hide by letting God's light shine into those dark nooks and crannies we have so far tried to keep secret. We need to learn to love the one who is Love.

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