

Sentence

This is the covenant that I will make with them, says the Lord; I will put My law within them and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be My people. *Jeremiah 31: 33*

Collect

O God our redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be Your messengers of forgiveness and hope: renew us by Your Spirit, that we may follow Your commands, and proclaim Your reign of love, through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

PSALM

119:9-16

EPISTLE

Hebrews 5:5-14

GOSPEL

John 12: 20 – 33

NOTES ON THE READINGS

It is a very sad state of affairs that there remain many people who are unfamiliar with the Scriptures, - and even somewhat unwilling to fill in the blanks, so to speak. This is not so much a criticism as a statement that such lacks make the Sunday Readings provide much mystery instead of great insight. Not only does knowledge of Hebrew history help enormously in understanding the New Testament, but there are also myriads of references and nuances that enlighten Gospel and Epistle. Indeed, perhaps the greatest reason that John's Revelation poses mystery or threat to readers stems from the failure to notice or know the extent to which John's imagery stems from the Old Testament.

Sadly, it is not possible to make up any shortfall here, but the attempt to provide some insight is paramount.

Old Testament Lesson

One of the matters referred to above is the constant reference in the OT to 'covenants.' Space does not permit an exposition here, but it should be noted that Israel always understood their faith in terms of the God Who commits Himself to His people.¹ And just as a growing child needs successive 'contracts with parents, so Israel needed the similar progression. (There were several covenants before Moses, but at that point in history, there was the Law – Exodus and all that. But legislation does not make a lot of difference to people's actions and behaviour, as attitudes must be 'owned.' Discipline may begin from outside a person – but the only real discipline is *self-discipline* and that is very much a matter of personal choice, commitment and involvement. It is towards this latter growth that Jeremiah pointed.

Psalm

While lots of Christians seem to rejoice in what they describe as a free Gospel, where forgiveness is offered without any real response, the Psalmist was aware of the value of all of God's 'judgements' and 'statutes' – without which, life becomes remarkably fragmented and disoriented. Gospel does not free a person from responsibility but rather charges them with it.

Epistle

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews may often sound obscure to modern readers, but if one can get past the cultural 'thing,' (and is aware of the Biblical background) there is a lot to be uncovered. Perhaps the most fascinating thing, for me at least, is that Biblical emphasis on the fact that the human damage

¹ Eg., the Greek title for the New Testament is διαθηκη – which is actually a one-sided agreement. That is, the terms are offered, and can only be accepted or rejected. Terms cannot be varied.

caused by human sin can only be addressed and ‘repaired’ by a human. Hence the profound statement here that although like Melchizedek, there are other ‘connections,’ Jesus had to go through the same sorts of life and experiences as you in order to be Saviour.

Mind you, the same author seemed to have difficulty with his own congregation or churches, finding even then that people preferred to stay at their comfort zone level rather than more towards maturity. Sadly, little has changed in the intervening millennia.

Gospel

One hardly knows where to start in trying to unpack this passage. Dear old John managed to write his Gospel deceptively simply, but there is also a far more profound level to what he conveyed. This is true of all his writing.

I often ask people to read the fine print. Here it is quite critical. ‘*There were some Gentiles.*’ Sure they were at the Festival, so must have been people looking at becoming Jews. But Gentile they were, and it is fascinating to find that Jesus spoke to them in terms that He seemed unable to use with obtuse Jews. It is a flash of revelation, indicating how far ahead of His Jewish disciples, that Jesus was.

Whenever John talks about ‘glorification,’ are you aware of what he is really describing? We often use words that means little to us. Here is no self-wrap like a pop star! It is something far more important.

Whenever Jesus is glorified, or God is, then it is a case of them being seen for what they truly are. Here is a transfiguration, if you like. The sudden dawning on (some) people as to the true nature of the person they are confronting. *And it is to Gentiles, **Gentiles!** That Jesus offered this ‘glorification.’* And that is completely unexpected.

On top of that, Jesus faced those potential Jewish converts with the complete and required response to the Gospel. That was – and is – to forget self, *deny* self, and follow Him. Does that not hit you right between the eyes, so to speak? To top it all off, John shows how Jesus found such a commitment quite something of a challenge.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

You might recall that, right at the start of this Season of Lent, I was naughty enough to suggest that Lent is not so much a period for giving things up for a time, but rather a matter of taking time out to check our priorities and choose the important aspects of discipleship. It strikes me that today’s Readings offer both the necessity and the process for growth in that discipleship.

But first to ‘real life.’ One of the discoveries that I made, a long time ago, is that this business of being a believer, a Christian, is not a matter of sudden discovery, change and ‘born again.’ On the contrary it is a long process, of stops and starts sometimes, that is a life-long experience. In fact, it is rather like being a person. Let me explain.

When I was a child, loving and remarkably wise parents nurtured me. There was nothing very fancy about Mum and Dad, - they would not have seen themselves as extraordinary. As we grew, it was not so much a matter of rules that had to be followed, but it was certainly a matter that we had to take notice of and respond obediently to our parents. Occasionally, I recall, punishment was meted out, like the time when I was ten and had a go at smoking. Dad made me wash my mouth out with soapy water.² However, as time passed and we grew up, there was far less evidence of rules and far more expectation that we would learn from experience. All this was done in an atmosphere of love and caring. [I feel deeply for people for whom such an experience never occurred for them.]

I remember, for instance, Dad talking to me as a mid- teenager. ‘I will never say to you “Don’t drink, Ronald.” However I will simply tell you that I have never drunk, because I did not know whether I would become a drunkard or not, and do not intend to find out the hard way.’ That tended to illustrate the sort of learning that was our experience of growing up. In other words, there was a subtle move from discipline imposed to discipline encouraged from within. In this day and age when discipline tends to be the current

² I must report that it did not have the required effect – as people who know me will report with some glee!

obscurity, I look for the time when wisdom overcomes even adult stupidity and when political correctness disappears into limbo.

Now all the above is there to try and set the scene. The long history of Israel parallels that growth from childhood to adulthood, with all the starts and stumbles along the way. And those starts and stumbles used to be presented to me as evidence of my sinfulness, something from which to repent so I would get to heaven. That annoys me still, as the real reason is far more adult and sensible than that. The whole point of the possibility of forgiveness in the Christian Faith is NOT to turn me into some sort of squeaky clean twerp, but rather is there to enable me to **face the fact** that I am capable of some pretty lousy things, to **learn from said mistakes**, and then to move towards that maturity that only Christian Faith can give.

So as Jeremiah has it, the passage of time and the growth towards development calls for changing relationships and progressive development. *From discipline imposed to discipline from within.* And the latter state is far more significant than the first. Apart from anything else, this is a far cry from the Christianity of my youth, when the charge was always to **believe, and ask no questions.** That can end only in a blank wall.

Last week, I asked people to ponder quite how they arrive at their theology, their understanding of God, How they learn to see the difference between what tends to be nothing other than 'accepted patterns of current behaviour and thought, and the really remarkably different approach to life that the Faith offers. And today I ask you to look at the continuing process of your discipleship , --- and to ensure that you continue to grow and develop way, way past your comfort zone.

Sentence

At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father
Phil. 2:10-11

Collect

Everlasting God, in Your tender love for the human race, You sent Your Son to take our nature upon Him and to suffer death upon the Cross; give us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, that, sharing His humility we may come to be with Him in His glory, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever
Amen

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Isaiah 50: 4 – 9a

PSALM

31: 9 – 18

EPISTLE

Philippians 2:5 – 11

GOSPEL

Mark 15: 1 – 39

NOTES ON THE READINGS

Please just stop for a moment and ponder the enigmatic position you are being asked to take about this Jesus. On the one hand, you are presented with a Person Whose whole life was given to others. That, is a world which, like ours, pandered to success and power. On the other hand, that same Person was denigrated, debased and executed like a common criminal. That death was a statement of the assessment placed on Jesus by His political and religious leaders of the time. This is rather more than the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ that Australians seem to enjoy indulging in; this is a deliberate statement by the power-brokers of Jesus’ day that He was far too dangerous to allow to live any longer.

That is the sort of world in which we live, *and never forget it.*

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

I do not know how long it will take for some Christians to see the death of Jesus as more than the ransom for their sins. While on that subject, I find it important to underline the fact that, if you sit up and take notice of the Biblical approach to the issue, what Jesus did on the Cross was to ‘wear’ whatever human evil could throw at Him, and destroy it by His refusal to retaliate. In Biblical terms, evil is overcome when it is shown up for what it is! The real struggle at the Cross was the harsh business of human evil being confronted by Divine good, the latter revealing that evil by allowing it to do its worst.

This, one of the final in the series of Isaiah’s Servant Songs, points up the profoundly difficult role that the Servant has – to remain true to God while coping with human bitter antagonism. The only encouragement here that the Servant can see is that – sooner or later – that evil human response will become clear to other people. Truth will survive whatever humans can throw at it.

PSALM

This is a far from pretty Psalm as it expresses the extreme anguish of someone who was ‘put through the mill’ by his contemporaries. It may have been jealousy of some sort that evoked such a harsh and judgemental response to the author of the Psalm. The only recourse that victim had was his appeal to God, Who perhaps alone knew and understood the truth of the situation. It has to be said that such situations are far from unknown and maybe a reader of these notes has been pressed out of shape by an erstwhile ‘friend.’

EPISTLE

The translation offered by the Revised English Bible has some unexpected twists to it. ‘Let this mind be in you’ is replaced by a rather greater challenge really. Certainly it is clearer. If we are to be disciples of

Christ, then we need to pattern our actions and attitudes on Him. This will take us in a direction diametrically opposite to what we may describe as ‘normal human.’

As I have pointed out elsewhere, this ancient Christian song asks us to compare Jesus with Adam.³ In the Genesis story, Adam DID grasp at equality (or even superiority!) with God, and that is the clearest Biblical statement of what constitutes sin. It is my determination to get on top of you, to control you, and to control all the circumstances surrounding me. It is hugely destructive, and painfully human.

Jesus operated totally differently, and that is the direction He puts in front of us to pursue.

GOSPEL

There is almost too much of the Gospel today to comment at any great length. In fact, by the time this Gospel is read there will not be a lot of time for a sermon – which may be a relief for some. However, as an exercise for yourselves, could I ask you to read through this painfully familiar story and notice the extent to which all but One of the major players found methods to protect themselves or following where the truth of the situation was obviously bidding them to head. Power, abuse, mockery and other means were employed to avoid following the obvious. How many systems and methods can people use to avoid the real issues? The story of Jesus’ trials portray a long list of miscarriages of justice; but then such trials are never otherwise.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

I must be too much of a traditionalist, for I bemoan the way in which Passion Sunday has overtaken Palm Sunday. The huge contrast between the raving welcome given to Jesus on Palm Sunday contrasts terribly with the baying crowd on the Friday morning. And that has always provided me with the challenge never to be only a fair weather friend or a fair-weather disciple.

On the other hand, the readings for Passion Sunday provide so much to ponder and make one’s own that the extent of the learning curve seems quite endless. First there is the exploration of Isaiah as he pondered the role of the Suffering Servant, and it is a measure of Isaiah’s insight as the Jesus story unfolded. The old prophet underlines the terrible and lonely road of the person who dares to be different and offer a superior way of living. Of course it all makes sense, that way of Jesus, but who is prepared to walk in that way? The Psalmist was passionately aware of the loneliness of being different.

The passage that sticks out head and shoulders even in this remarkable series of readings is that most marvellous of Epistles. As I have often said, if this is all there ever was of the New Testament, then the Gospel of Christ would be remarkably vivid and clear in this ancient Christian hymn. For the Gospel is far more than wacko I can be forgiven. It is clearly visible here that the Gospel is the offer from God Himself to chose to follow Christ in the pattern of living. In complete contrast to Adam, Jesus lived lowly and as a servant. If and when we follow the pattern ourselves, then people will perhaps begin to see the real and profound value of the Gospel, not in the world to come but right in the here and now.

Would you allow me to run something past you that may cause some dismay. What I tend to see all around me is such a distortion of the Gospel as makes mockery of our Lord. It seems to me that there are far too few Christians of any persuasion that have even begun to see past the terribly human capacity for powering over all other people in an attempt to control. They call it Gospel. It is, in fact, a complete denial of our Lord.

Very sadly indeed, most of the ‘Gospel preaching’ I hear is little other than the offer of an escape mechanism from Hell. Trust and Jesus and you will be forgiven. No ifs, buts nor maybes, but a blanket promise of no responsibility of any sort. All sorts of proof texts are offered and repeated to back up the claims, but like a lot of sects and isms, most of the real evidence is left to one side and invisible. So what is the real Gospel all about? Certainly not triumphalism.

Spend some time to ponder those Readings today – and look past the point where you may have got so far. The picture Isaiah presents of the Suffering Servant is of One Who persists in the chosen direction,

³ Remember, *Adam* is humanity, you – not some indistinct ancestor from a forgotten past.

regardless of the contrary pressure. But there is no power struggle about this. It is the quiet determination of a person who is powerfully aware of the fact that imposition of power on people is always, every time, utterly **counter-productive**. Here is someone prepared to stick their neck out to show as clearly as possible that LOVE not power is the only way to reconciliation, to relationships at every level. He is so convinced that, regardless of what happens to him as people reject and banish him, that the truth will emerge for anyone who has the integrity to see it. *That begs the question, but there lies the reality.* The Church is not strong when it is in control. That is precisely when it loses its way, and becomes itself almost the Anti-Christ. It has stood the Faith on its head!

Just to underline the situation, almost in letters red and vivid, the Epistle is that most magnificent of NT readings from Philippians. Do you begin to catch sight of the tremendous contrast that Paul is describing, between Jesus and Adam? In the story of the fall, the great goal for Adam was to be like gods. To be Boss. To be in control. To tell everyone else what to do and how to do it, because he knows best. This is exactly what the whole Bible calls 'sin.' It is such a very destructive path to follow, as anyone who has been pressured knows all about. *And most of us have played this game, even in reverse, with others, in order to get our own way. All it does is divide people. Isolate people. Segregate people.* Spend a moment to ponder what use the exercise of power has done for Iraq. (Or even USA.)

This is the reason for Jesus to be shepherd, to be servant, to show by the sheer humility of living it all out Himself, that there is a far better way to live, to operate and to relate to each other. It is to offer, not to demand. It is to give a choice, not to demand a response. It is to cop all that evil humanity can throw at Him, and not retaliate. And He did all that, not just to be 'nice,' but to underline the reality that here lies the only way for any human beings *anywhere* to have a future and a hope.

The Gospel is about being 'saved,' not from some Hell or other, but towards a far more creative and constructive way of life. Here. Now.

Sentence

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: there let us keep the feast

1 Cor. 5:7

Collect

Brightness of God's glory, Whom death could not conquer nor the tomb imprison; as You have shared in the frailty of human flesh, help us to share in Your immortality in the spirit. Reveal Yourself to us this day and all our days, as the First and Last, the Living One, our immortal Saviour and Lord. **Amen**

FIRST LESSON

Acts 10: 34 – 43

FOR THE PSALM

Hymn to the Risen Christ

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 15: 1 – 11

GOSPEL

Mark 16: 1 – 8

NOTES ON THE READINGS ..

I will often ask people –when hearing or thinking about the Readings,- to take notice of the fine print. That means, either to know quite something about the passage and its context, and/or to refuse to allow familiarity to overlook the information given in the passage. It is far too easy to assume that you know it all, for that is when you may well miss much of the point.

First Lesson

If you are a little mystified by the inclusion of this Reading on Easter Day, then keep thinking. You may be satisfied, initially, with the fact that there is clear reference to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Now let's travel that extra mile.

This event took place well after the Resurrection, when it is clear that much of the ramifications of the Gospel had yet to impact even on the Apostles. This incident, with the Roman Centurion, is another of those fascinating learning curves for the Apostles, and for Peter in particular. *They had to work through their theology just as much as you do!*

Peter was stunned to confront the extent to which this pagan military overlord understood about life and faith and reality. It was an affront to Peter's religious heritage and background. Like all Jews, he remained convinced that all Gentiles were beyond the pale, ignorant, and of utterly no interest to God. This incident had the effect of (beginning the) changing all that. Like any 'epiphany' or transfiguration,' it ran against Peter's grain, and needed some time in order for him to come to terms with it all.

In other words, it is about time Christians, including the most conservative of them all, took off their blinkers and saw things as they really are.

For the Psalm

There is rather a lot to ponder in this rather stunning old Christian hymn: not least of which is the reference to the Passover. In case it has never hit you before, the Biblical record is quite constant in its appreciation of the fact that the Passover, and the Exile are all part of the one plan of redemption, and are all very illustrative of the Divine approach to the human dilemma. The Resurrection is rather more than the means whereby you get to heaven. It is in fact the example *par excellence* as to how Christians should operate as humans in a world that turns its back on God. Here is no religious illustration: here is down-to-earth information on why to operate as Christian, for here lies the only workable and valid way to reconciliation for any human situation. That reference to Adam (yes, that is what is being referred to) is making it quite clear that in Christ there is a completely different way to operate. Why do so few Christians even see that let alone follow?

Epistle

Back when I was a very young priest, the old Prayer Book has this passage as the reading as a Funeral. It is powerful stuff, but I am sure that most if it went over the heads of mourners unless they were believers. There are a couple of items that strike me as important as we refer to this passage.

First, please do see that Paul saw the necessity of offering to people of his day some real and tangible evidence that Jesus has risen. None of that evidence (talking to people who spoke to the Risen Christ) is available to us today, but there were mobs of witnesses, eyewitnesses, then. So Paul was saying that there were then lots of people who could verify the facts. (If he was trying to fool people, then he was being remarkably stupid.)

Now second, that raises a problem for moderns. If such evidence was necessary then, why it is that we are no longer able to access such evidence for something so hugely important. I find the answer to that rather stunning. If resurrection sounds all a bit too much in this cynical and scientific age, then I ask you to ponder awhile.

What does the resurrection say to us? It is not just (if I can put it that way) that Jesus rose again from the dead. It is a powerful statement that truth can be suppressed but not killed. The same is true about love, and about all the important factors of life. And the only way I can be sure of that **is to be committed to truth, to love, to justice and everything else**. Only by treading that path can I be sure that these things are true. The evidence is there all right; but I need to stick my neck out to be sure of it.

GOSPEL

It is always the ladies, is it not, who are there bright and early to deal with the practical issues of life and of death. Nothing seems to put them off. Mind you, I have more than a sneaky suspicion those Jewish peoples, and the ladies in particular, have always been down to earth. I can tell a story of a particularly remarkable lady and her response to her husband dying right there at home. Certainly, they were overtaken by events, but they had their feet on the ground. There was a job to be done, and an unpleasant one at that. But there they were, with all the equipment needed for the task.

On the other hand, none of the disciples were in any way prepared for the events that were to unfold before their very eyes. And it was the ladies that had to convey the message to the Eleven, - which is something which makes us look beyond the old male hang-ups, surely, as the women led the way.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

Perhaps it has been a matter of over-exposure, but I am getting to the stage where the great Christian celebrations do not excite me as they did. Much of the reason for that response in me has very little to do with the reality behind the season – it has more to do with the strange and inflated stuff that passes as sermons or explanations of the Seasons.

I guess that part of my problem also lies with dearly-loved parents who lived their faith without wearing in on their shirt-sleeves, and were really quite down-to-earth people in everything that they did. While we were certainly excited by Christmas as kids, it was always made clear that there was little point in celebrating if the rest of one's life did not reflect the attitudes that the Season emphasised. Christmas is giving; Easter is forgiving; and if one did not operate along those lines *every* day of the year, then one was missing the point.

Run all that alongside a world where advertising for Christmas **spending** begins in late October, and where the hard sell increases in stridency as December 25th draws closer. Parallel to that is the constant news flashes of under-age drinking and car accidents, sudden death or long-drawn-out depression. One of the things that must be of almost total disappointment to the unbelieving world is the tinselled pointlessness of the season. Worse happens when the credit card chickens come home to roost about a month later.

I am not being all morose and negative! I am wondering why people other than Christians celebrate Christmas **at all**. It must be totally pointless for them.

Sentence

Jesus said, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.'

John 20:21

Collect

Risen Christ, Whose absence leaves us in despair, and Whose presence is overwhelming: breathe on us with Your abundant life, that where we cannot see, we may be encouraged to believe, that we may be raised with You. Amen

FIRST LESSON

Acts 4: 32 – 36

PSALM

133

EPISTLE

1 John 1:1 – 2:2

GOSPEL

JOHN 20: 19 – 31

NOTES ON THE READINGS

First Lesson

There may well be a whole range of cameos in the Acts that are not familiar to many present-day readers. This particular one is an absolute beauty, being somewhat in line with that *random, foolish acts of generosity* comment that used to be popular a few years ago, Here is record of an experiment that should have succeeded, but really did lapse (or collapse!) because of sheer human cupidity.

It is ever the case, is it not, that we Christians are capable of the most loving and risky choices for others, or at least in the talking about it. However, when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, we tend to step back. If ever you wonder why St. Paul was for ever taking up collections for the Jerusalem Church, ot roots may well be traced back here. The idea was wonderful; the execution dreadful. It was an experiment with (dare you say this?) communism. Not the Russian sort, but the basic version.

Psalm

For the life of me, I have never been able to make the connection between brethren unity and oil on Aaron's beard. Dew of Hermon, of course, even sounds enormously refreshing, but oil? Perhaps we ought to begin with the expression of unity and belonging together, without the involvement of the hip pocket nerve. But even that tends to come undone because I see things differently to you.

Epistle.

Dear old John; small wonder that he was held in high esteem in the Infant Church. Simple words as usual, with profound insight if you dare to explore. One of the issues that modern minds may miss is the emphasis on *incarnation*. The tangible Jesus if you like to put it that way. So much of modern 'religion' lays emphasis on the spiritual. The Christian Faith is rather different, aligning with the need for expression in human and tangible terms. I am no use to you if I do not love my brother **right here and now**.

Gospel

If they think about it, the purists may well have difficulty with this passage, for here is Pentecost before Pentecost, if you dare. The Holy Spirit comes to the Eleven, well before the events portrayed in Acts 2. There is the *shalom*, and there is the *Spirit*. And there is the ever-present emphasis on *forgiveness*.

However, that which always hits me between the eyes is the popularist misapprehension about poor old Thomas. Disbelieving he is not. In fact Thomas usually tended to be light-years ahead of the rest of the crew. The reality is that Thomas is aware of the enormity of the change to life is Jesus really is risen. Nothing can ever be the Same again! But he was not prepared to take someone else's word for something so

hugely significant. He needed cold hard evidence. And you will notice, if you dare, that Jesus gave it to him. Please note that Thomas was ever the one to ask the hard questions that no one else dared mention, and yet everyone needed the answers. Thank the Lord for Thomas. I think he is tops.

Sentence

Turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Acts 3:19

Collect.

Lord of life, by submitting to death, You conquered the grave; by being lifted upon the Cross You draw all peoples to Yourself: by being raised from the dead, You restore to humanity all that was lost through sin. Be with us in Your Risen power, that in word and deed we may proclaim the mystery of Your death and resurrection, for all praise is Yours, now and through all eternity. **Amen**

FIRST LESSON

Acts 3: 12 – 20

PSALM

4

EPISTLE

1 John 2: 15 – 17 & 3:1-6

GOSPEL

Luke 24: 36 – 48

NOTES ON THE READINGS

First Lesson.

This little epilogue to the healing of the lame man has more to tell us about ourselves than about the incident. The story has less to do with miracle and more to do with terrible human inconsistency.

As with Jesus, the usual question had to do with ‘by what authority’ with the result that the benefit to the patient was lost in the argument about validity. Notice that the same reversal of issues showed up in the death of Jesus and the release of a murderer. It would be a most useful exercise if and when Christians stopped and thought through the sometimes bitter arguments that have about the Faith, especially when the outcome tends to be nothing other than a great divide between people. It is blasphemous, actually.

In the second paragraph there is another rather fascinating aspect of the Faith well worth examination. On one hand there is the stunning situation where God uses human stupidity to bring about His designs. It is the awareness of that folly that even led Isaiah to catch sight of what God does. If you prefer to put it another way, then stop and see that it is always the *forgiving one* who has to bear the pain and ignominy of initiating the means of reconciliation. Think that one through if you dare.

Psalm

Ponder this Psalm and see how its author, likewise, focusses on the terrible human capacity of avoiding the truth by choosing its opposite. That loving what is worthless is a powerful expression of our human folly. Aware of all that, the Psalmist suggests that we head in the opposite (and sensible) direction.

Epistle

Once again, the emphasis is on thinking rather more seriously about what is real and what is ephemeral. I find it rather annoying when some Christians seem to like aligning whatever they do NOT like with ‘the world,’ and miss the real point of these sorts of expressions. Perhaps the clearest definition of what is ‘world’ stems from the overall picture provided by the Faith. To be in Adam is to be self-obsessed. To be in Christ is to be other-concerned. The former is world, and the latter is not. It really is as simple and as pointed as that. And one needs only to ponder a few moments to realize the extent to which the ‘world’ is self-driven.

GOSPEL

There are a couple of significant issues that arise for me in this passage.

The first is the down-to-earth request of Jesus, for something to eat. Here is the clear expression of what may be called ordinariness in the Risen Christ. Here is no mind-bending, psychedelic sort of thing, but the simple statement that this is feet on ground stuff. Redemption happens in the real world, with real issues being raised and faced.

The second is that business about ‘understanding the Scriptures.’ Here is no recital of chapter and verse, but rather a matter of seeing and understanding the way in which God works **in the ordinary world with ordinary people**, and with a clear and specific agenda. Most Christians that I have encountered seem to put on their blinkers when it comes to reading the Old Testament, or even the New. So easily do we manage to limit our vision by our own propaganda and myopia.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

I have long wondered at the sort of world we are all becoming, where everything it seems becomes quite relative, and noting remotely like certain is permitted any more. I am bemused at most of the sentences that are handed down for offences of various kinds, minor and significant, and the pathetic excuses that are pulled out to justify people’s actions. The business in Bali is indicative, and the reaction to the Singapore Government’s actions underline the case. Everybody says that they hate drugs, runners and peddlers, until there is a possibility that anyone caught just might get their comeuppance.

It is not just in that area, but in almost every area of human behaviour. No one wants to accept responsibility, and they certainly do not want to be landed with the unpretty outcome of such a direction. Whether it is kids at School or adults at work and play. Is there no a factor of this refusal to face reality in the ever-burgeoning road toll.

You may well have all sorts of similar comments yourself, from people or incidents that you have encountered. In other words, I doubt if there is any great need to try and list the issues. Nor am I trying to stand in judgement on others, for I am aware of the fact that there may have been and could yet be situations that I have tried to sidestep. The issue is the fact of it all.

And then the issue becomes the amount of damage caused to people, to relationships, and even to life itself. That is the problem, because I cannot expect to operate without responsibility, and then to get away without a scratch. What is more, those around me are like to suffer from what the Yanks call ‘collateral damage.’

You may well ask what all this has to do with today’s Readings, and with the Resurrection of Jesus. And the answer is simple: this is precisely what all those readings are about. They are about false choices that people make to avoid issues they do not wish to face. They are about our terribly human capacity to solve our problems by avoiding them. They are about the outcomes from such *modus operandi*.

There is a sad irony about the fact that so much human effort goes into attempting outcomes that are thwarted by the very design itself. For instance, the invasion of Iraq was undertaken, so the pundits tell us, to bring democracy to the country and to remove the dictator. Whilst the concept may be laudable in one’s own country, it is a very risky process to follow, for the outcomes --- well, you can see what happens. How would you like to have another country decide that we need a regime change, and they are just the ones to do it. Well, they have all the clues, do they not?

Now do you catch sight of some of the reasons Jesus operated, and operates in the way that He does. That is because – whilst it may be a slower process by a long shot, - it is far more likely to produce creative outcomes, and certainly will NOT add to the angst and anger.