

Good Friday

14th April 17

Place: St Mary's

Theme: The faithfulness of
God

Hebrews 10.16-25

- ◆ Good Friday sermons often focus on human betrayal. This morning I want to talk about the faithfulness of God as well.
- ◆ Both Judas and Peter betray Jesus on Maundy Thursday and nearly all the disciples run away on Good Friday. Judas betrays Jesus to the authorities, letting them know where they will find him at a time when he is away from the crowds who might try and stop them arresting him. Judas's motivation is not clear. John thinks he did it for the money, however in Matthew and the synoptics this is less clear. Some commentators have suggested that he wanted to provoke Jesus into political action. We just don't know why he did it, only that he was paid 30 pieces of silver for doing it.
- ◆ Peter's betrayal comes later that night, when he has followed Jesus to the house of Caiaphas the high priest. Only a few hours after he has sworn he will never desert Jesus he claims he has never met him three times. The rest of the twelve did not even get as far as Caiaphas's house. All of the men but John disappear until after the crucifixion.
- ◆ What we forget about the story is that they would also have felt betrayed on Good Friday;

2

betrayed by God. They had put all their hopes in Jesus to bring about a political change to save Israel from the oppression of the Romans and make them free. Instead the Roman's seem to have won the day, when they crucify Jesus.

When the bystanders taunt Jesus on the cross saying 'You saved others, now save yourself' isn't it likely that was what the disciples were thinking too?

- ◆ Betrayal is a common and painful part of being human. We betray others and ourselves all too often. All of us put our hope and faith in people and things that cannot sustain the burden of it. No other human being can save us, even ourselves. None of us is perfect, none of us is infallible, none of us is invincible. We are all flawed, sinful, human creatures.
- ◆ The writer to the letter of the Hebrews says 'He who has promised is faithful.' Good Friday is as much about the faithfulness of God as it is about the betrayal and sinfulness of human beings. Why is it that the cross is a sign of the faithfulness of God when at the time the first disciples thought that it was a sign of betrayal by God?
- ◆ What is the faithfulness of God?
- ◆ Let me begin by talking about what it is not. God's faithfulness is not some kind of insurance policy or guarantee that we will get what we think we want from God. We need to look no

further than the events of Good Friday to see that being close to God doesn't stop bad things happening to you. In fact closer attention to the Bible suggests rather the opposite.

- ◆ Before Good Friday the Disciples were following Jesus, but they were also following their own agenda. Only days before the crucifixion James and John get their mum to put in a good word for them, so when Jesus is King they will get plum jobs. They don't hear Jesus's warnings that this is not what is going to happen.
- ◆ They probably felt let down by God, but the God they were let down by was the god of their own desires and ambitions, not the living God.
- ◆ The nature of God's faithfulness is most fully demonstrated on the cross because the cross is God's response to our sin, or putting other things instead of him first; our unwillingness and inability to make our relationship with him the centre of our lives. God's faithfulness is not making our dreams come true, but staying with us, loving us and forgiving us despite the worst we can do.
- ◆ God does not abandon us to our folly and our sin. God's response to the evil and suffering in the world is not to leave us to stew in our own juice. God comes and shares the life of this broken, cruel, sorry world. He shares in our grief and losses. In doing so he brings us true freedom.

- ◆ God in Christ is faithful to the end. He forgives to the end. It is God's faithfulness to us that holds Christ to the cross, not the nails. His love and integrity mean that he won't betray us by taking the easy option. He won't abandon us even when we abandon him. He goes even to the place of ultimate desolation, through the gates of death to the grave; for us. In doing this he demonstrates that there is nothing in us or the world that can separate us from the love of God.
- ◆ He is faithful, he is forgiving, even when we are our worst. He is love. His love and goodness cannot be defeated by our betrayal, our folly or our sin. He is faithful to the end and so finally we can see freedom and hope. We hope not in the easy life and shallow dreams of this world, but in the one who will never let us go. The one who loves us with perfect, enduring love. As we begin to see God's true faithfulness we can hold all else in the world lightly, enjoying it for what it is, and set free from our dependency on it and the tyranny of our desires. This freedom comes through knowing that the only one in whom we can truly trust is with us to the end and trusting his faithfulness.