Lent 3 (Stowe) Ps 22 1-18

Mk 10: 32-34

**The courage of Jesus**

Whilst it is not really recommended reading from a Christian point of view there is a bon mot in Fleming’s novel Goldfinger when the evil Auric Goldfinger meets the hero for the third time, with Bond at a disadvantage, from which, as we all know, he escapes to triumph in the end.

Mr Bond, they have a saying in Chicago: "Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. The third time it's enemy action."

This is the third prediction in St Mark of the outcome of Jesus journey to Jerusalem in as many chapters. It is a chilling prediction of enemy action, from which in human terms the Lord Jesus does not escape – and never intended to, but which nevertheless leads on to victory.

IN the gospel of Mark the revelation of His true nature and first prediction of his death, and the crushing rebuke of Peter come at Caesarea Philippi, significantly, just about as far north and away from Jerusalem as Jesus ever travels. The journey south then begins and as Mark tells us 6 days later they are at the Mount of Transfiguration. Again there comes a miraculous revelation of Jesus’ nature followed by a crushing failure for the disciples, this time involving an epileptic boy. The second prediction follows, with a little more detail. At this point Luke’s account adds **‘When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem’**

In Mark the disciples begin to get a sense of impending doom, but we are told **‘They did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him’**

Some days later and further south towards Jerusalem we have the third prediction of His death,this time with even more detail, and that telling few words ‘**They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them’**

And that little phrase there is much meaning**.** Jesus is ahead because of his determination to carry through the Father’s plan. The disciples are behind because they are afraid of the future. They know that death lies ahead. Our lord spells it out for them in explicit terms, for the avoidance of any doubt we might say.

Jesus was clear about his mission. As John 5: 30 and 6: 38 record him saying

**because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me**

and

**for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me**

The LORD clearly knew the fate that awaited him in Jerusalem. We cannot know if he knew all the details as in our first reading, Ps 22, from which He quotes on the cross. We do know that the horror of what was coming to him was apparent to him in the garden

Luke 22:44 records

**44In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground**

.So it is in this context that we are looking at the *Courage of Jesus*. Now we might say, and it would be true, that this extraordinary courage was derived and strengthened by and from his relationship with his Heavenly Father. That cannot be allowed to diminish in any way the existential terror and horror of it that was bound to be his as human being contemplating his immediate but slow torturous death– and long ago the church rejected the heresy of Docetism, from *dokein* it seems which taught that Jesus only seemed to be human, and therefore the true Christ did not suffer as a human being.

In 110 AD Ignatius of Antioch wrote of the docetists

They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again

Whenever we take communion we may reflect upon the real physical torture and the mental anguish, fully and personally anticipated and experienced that are more than just represented by the bread and wine. ‘Thou art here, we ask not how’ (Hymn)

This is the courage of Jesus that we consider today. A total determination to go through with what he clearly saw lay ahead of him.

William Barclay commenting on this passage half a century ago (hence the gender specificity of the words) wrote

*There are two kinds of courage. There is the courage which is a kind of instinctive reaction, the courage which is almost a reﬂex action, the courage of the man confronted out of the blue with a crisis and emergency, to which he instinctively reacts with courage and gallantry, about which he has not even time to think, Many a man has become a hero in the heat of the moment.~ But there is also the courage of the man who sees the grim thing approaching -far ahead, of the man who has plenty time to turn back, of the man who could, if he chose to do so, evade the issue, ' and who yet inﬂexibly goes on. There is no doubt which is the higher courage.*

*This cold, deliberate facing of the future which is known is a far higher thing. That is what Jesus did. If no higher verdict was possible, it would still be true to say of Jesus that He ranks with the heroes of the world.*

Our Lord’s death has inspired millions of others to follow down the centuries, occasionally as nastily, and sometimes over many months of pain. We may consider those who have been tormented and killed by ISIS in recent times, but as I said the catalogue goes back further - for two millennia, including, in the medieval period and the reformation Christian action against other Christians. It does not seem unreasonable to me that we should pray never to have to face that kind of test, but alongside it to pray that should such evil come upon us, our Lord’s extraordinary courage in and determination to do his Father’s will, for our salvation might be our inspiration and source of strength.