

Rewriting history

Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Zephaniah 3:14-end, Psalm 116:1-3, 10-end and Luke 24:13-35

The story from Luke is familiar – two disciples, heart-broken, grieving, “looking sad”, trudge along the road from Jerusalem, the city which three days earlier had been the scene of so much drama. The cult that Cleopas and his companion belonged to had been quashed when their leader was unjustly tried, tortured and put to a brutal death. When the stranger draws alongside, Cleopas tells him that they had hoped that Jesus would be “the one to redeem Israel”. Their dejection is palpable.

The two men are bound for Emmaus. Perhaps they’re looking for a break from the chaos of the city, possibly they’re afraid for their own safety. Whatever the reason for their journey, it’s one of the darker moments in the New Testament.

So it’s astonishing that the unimaginable joy that they were about to experience would spring from the very source of their despondency. It’s summed up by Fr Denis McBride in his book *The Road to Emmaus and Beyond*, when he writes: “The past is not dead; it lingers on as a resource for meaning or it waits for new interpretation.”

It’s a wonderful idea – that, far from being fixed in history, the past can change through our reinterpretation – the realisation that, even in the darkest moments, when no redemption or resurrection seems remotely possible, God is there all the while. It’s why the writer of the book of Zephaniah, today’s alternative Old Testament reading, celebrates the fact that “the Lord, is in your midst”. ☺



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Lord, who walked alongside his disciples in their grief and reinvented the past for them, turning tragedy into triumph, strengthen our faith, to know that you are in the midst of everything in our lives, too. Amen.

Books of the Old Testament – *Esther*

by Trevor Dennis

The story of Esther concerns an attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. Read by religious Jews each year at their festival of Purim, it has become a particularly powerful tale since the Holocaust.

The setting is the opulent court of the king of Persia in the fifth century BC. Haman becomes the king’s second in command and decrees that all must bow down before him. When a Jew called Mordecai refuses, Haman tells the king that the Jews

are different and dangerous. The king decrees that they should be wiped out. Yet the king has a Jew in his court – his own queen, Esther! Mordecai warns her of the plot, and with great courage and cunning she sets about defeating Haman’s plans. The story ends with fearful slaughter.

Is the king manipulated, or is he his own man? Esther appears at first to be at the service of those around her, but she knows how to play the game at court. All of them are corrupted by the violence of tyranny, where God is nowhere to be seen – for God is not even mentioned once. ☺

“It is not the body’s posture, but the heart’s attitude that counts when we pray.”

Billy Graham (1918-2018), evangelist

Let us pray – ACTS of prayer

Part 3 – T is for thanksgiving

by Kathryn Fleming

According to Meister Eckhart: “If the only prayer you ever say in our entire life is ‘Thank you’, it will be enough.” It’s easy, when all is well, to throw God a compliment – but the prayer of thanksgiving is so much more than this. It may start in response to a sudden awareness of God’s goodness – the birth of a child, a crisis averted, a friendship renewed – and it’s absolutely right that such blessings inspire gratitude. But we are called to a habit of thankfulness that enables us not just to notice daily blessings

but to carry on regardless of whether the immediate situation is easy to celebrate, or quite the reverse.

“Give thanks in all circumstances,” said Paul to the Thessalonians. In all circumstances! For me this is very much about trying to reach an underlying certainty that, since God is love, God is always intent on the best outcome.

Sometimes my thankfulness emerges through gritted teeth, but practising thanksgiving is good for faith and deepens our sense of God’s goodness and our faith in God’s love. ☺