

Kathryn Fleming *reflects on*
Mark 10:35-45

You do not know what you are asking.”
Is it fanciful to imagine these words floating through the mind of the Almighty as we petition God day by day, seeking to bend God’s will to ours? I’m pretty certain that often our anxious requests are as wildly wrongheaded as that hope of James and John, who had so misunderstood the nature of God’s kingdom that they believed they could solicit seats at the top table for the heavenly banquet.

We stand in one place, with a very limited perspective – and it is from there that we act, think and pray. If Jesus had started the conversation by asking his friends if they wanted to suffer as he was going to, had suggested that they too might have the option of becoming the servants of all, I’m confident that they would have stepped back hurriedly. But they couldn’t see that coming, had no idea where the Jesus story would take them. They’d hoped for something quite different and it’s easy to imagine their incredulous disappointment when Jesus started talking about a life of loving service.

Their route to glory had looked much simpler – an easy win. That’s not God’s way – but though there is a cost, it’s one that God bears for us. We simply have to trust, and pray for God’s will to be done, in us, for us and through us. ☺

Prison chaplaincy

by Heather Smith

Reading Prison, now closed, is famous as the prison where Oscar Wilde was incarcerated and where he wrote his poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”. On the wall of the waiting room for visiting professionals and volunteers was a quote by Fyodor Dostoevsky: “The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

While their job is to minister to prisoners, many chaplains talk of the profound beneficial effect

that prisoners – men, women and children alike – have on their own lives. One priest, whose experience is described in Richard Atherton’s book *Summons to Serve*, described spending Holy Week in prison, drawing comparisons with Christ’s passion. Although many inmates had been hurt and betrayed, or were dependent on others, as Jesus depended on Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross, or though they bore the anguish of their inability to look after their families, as Jesus looked down at his mother at the foot of the cross, the prisoners he met were courteous and welcoming, willing to share with him what little they had. ☺

“A comprehended God is no God at all.”

Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769), German devotional writer



Seeing the world upside down

God, whose Son turns the world upside down, turn us upside down as well until our priorities match yours, our ways become your ways and our story taken up into your story, with the perfect happy ending. Amen.

Books of the Old Testament Part 30 – Amos

by Richard Greatrex

The opening verses of Amos are set in the peaceful, prosperous reign in Israel of Jeroboam II (788-747 BC), identifying this as the earliest of the prophetic books. Amos describes himself as a farmer, herder and tender of fruit trees from Judah. In the opening chapters he describes God touring the region, judging the surrounding nations for their misdemeanours. The focus then shifts on to Judah, before ending with accusations against the self-indulgent elites of the Northern Kingdom.

In chapters three to six we learn that Jeroboam’s

reign hasn’t brought about a harmonious, integrated nation – gross inequalities abound. This provokes the wrath of the priest Amaziah, who sends Amos packing. Back in Judah, the prophet continues to warn Israel’s leaders that oppressing poor people provokes God’s action against them. The book concludes with a speech addressed to Judah reinforcing God’s judgement and holding out the hope of eventual restoration through repentance.

Amos’ message is clear: justice and righteousness are at the heart of God’s plan; whenever a nation or generation ignores them, they will be judged and chastised. ☺