

OT: Exodus 20.1-17

NT: I Corinthians 1.18-25

Gp: John 2.13-22

If you have followed the news this week, you will have seen an astonishing contrast take place in Russia. One day, a ruthless dictator, alone on a vast stage to ensure all eyes are in him. Before him, a hand picked audience of people who either through fear or a conscious decision to align themselves with this evil, applaud his every word. An audience who will never dispute the lies dripping from his mouth, will never condemn the constant slaughter of any political revival to this man, an audience who condone a war of attrition in Ukraine where so many of their neighbours and own people are dying for the vanity of this one man.

And the next day the funeral of a man, Alexei Navalny who lived and died by integrity, by a strong sense of justice, who actively opted to return to his country despite having already been poisoned by the authorities, who knew he was returning to certain detention or most likely death on the orders of the dictator who feared him. And the people came voluntarily in their thousands to pay their respects at his funeral, came to thank him and his family for all he had done for them, came despite the threat of physical harm, of imprisonment and maybe even death.

On the one hand a man seemingly successful by human standards but condemned to continue to take whatever measures possible to hold on to power. On the other hand, a man who fearlessly was willing to submit all power completely in order to remain a servant of truth and righteousness. The second man most surely stronger and wiser than the first.

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

In the early chapters of John's gospel, he tells of the various ways that Jesus challenged and riled the Jewish authorities whom he saw to be wrong in their ways so that they continued to look for a means to stop and silence him. In today's gospel story, we see Jesus consumed by anger for the way in which the holy temple was being desecrated by those making money there.

'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'

When I was a small child, we were all given a prayer card which said:

*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild
Look upon this little child.*

And it had a sickly painting of someone who looked as though they lived on milk sops! This was not the Jesus of the gospels, this was not the man who always acted with courage and integrity, with the grace of God. This was not the Jesus who was willing to defy the authorities in their selfish and false ways, even knowing that a cruel death would be his outcome.

It is not by chance that the first reading today outlines the ten commandments, the Law handed down by God to Moses on the mountain. Commandments which have often been subject to human interpretation in order for some people to justify their questionable actions, but which were succinctly summed up by Jesus when he was asked, 'Which is the greatest commandment?'

Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

This sets the benchmark by which we should live. If we follow these commandments, we follow all ten and we live by God's weakness and God's foolishness. We open our hearts to the Holy Spirit, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and we, thereby, live according to the Father's will.

It does not mean that we will necessarily be persecuted or that we won't hold positions of power as defined by this world. But it does mean that we will bring a sense of serving others, acting in faith and truth, of putting ourselves last in all we do.

At our baptism when we or our Godparents made the promises for us, we said:

I submit to Christ.

This isn't passively rolling over, being meek and mild. This is about standing up for truth, for calling out injustice where we see it, about challenging those who act only for themselves and not for others.

And like Jesus, we start where we stand. In being true to our Christian calling each day in the place where we are, we trust in the grace of God, we believe he knows the whole picture. We can make a difference in our own community, where we live or where we work.

Like Mother Teresa when she was challenged about how she could possibly solve the problem of poverty in India, she said you start by rescuing one child from the gutter. And like a stone thrown into a pond, the good we do will ripple out, even though we may not see the effect.

After all, who would have thought that one man with twelve questionable followers in Palestine more than two thousand years ago would have such an impact on the world today and across the centuries. That's the foolishness and the weakness of God for you!

Revd Michelle Montrose