

Heavenly Father, as we read scripture may your Spirit keep us focussed upon Jesus, today and every day. Amen.

- *'Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified ...'*
- What do you need to ensure your own wellbeing?
 - The Jews knew what to do. They focused on knowing who they were as a people, and the greatest physical sign of this was the temple in Jerusalem where they offered sacrificial offerings to their God. It was a wonderful statement that said God was in control, and he would save them. It was also a brilliant economically successful business and people clamoured to exchange their filthy Roman money for clean temple money to buy doves and lambs at inflated prices to show their commitment to God.
 - It had many good things about it but sometimes it seemed the financial economics overcame the spirituality as the stalls of animal sellers and money changers spilled into the only areas where non-Jews could worship. Only Jews could reach the holier bits.
 - But generally, the Jews, although downtrodden by the Romans knew who they were and where they were going, even if they did wonder why God was not acting to save them from the Romans.
 - The Jews used signs like the temple to bolster their own wellbeing.
 - On the other hands Greek philosophy was rather more refined. Greek wisdom was a well developed and venerable tradition, starting with people like Plato and moving forward.
 - Educated Greeks loved to debate in the market-place. Talking is good. Shared community is good. As a nation, they knew they were on a journey of discovery, and they debated it endlessly, without apparently coming to any conclusions.
 - It must have been a bit of an exclusive club, but Greeks certainly desired wisdom
- *'Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified ...'*
 - Today, wellbeing is a much used term. The Corona pandemic has rubbed home the discovery that human beings are fragile creatures, and many of us have found our wellbeing dented by pressures and expectations, worries and anxieties, loss and bereavement, loneliness and stagnation, lack of physical touch and the endlessly succeeding months for which it might continue.
 - In order to bolster our self-esteem we are urged to talk, to pamper ourselves a little, to take exercise and to make sure we have enough time off.
 - And it is important that restaurants open because they will be a boost to the economy.
 - Which is all good stuff.
 - So why is it that happiness and fulfillment seem to be at an all-time low over the last two decades and mental health issues are going through the roof?
- To desecrate St Paul's phraseology a little, *'Jews demand signs, Greeks desire wisdom, and Britains seek entertainment and relaxation and a straightforward life ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified ...'*
- On the face of it, Christ crucified seems to fail on all accounts.
- Crucifixion is a sign of weakness. Of failure. Of letting others trample over you, abuse you, and mutilate you. It ends with extinction. With death. Which is hardly going to be bolstering to your wellbeing!
 - But *'God's weakness is stronger than human strength.'*
- Crucifixion seems to be ultimate in foolishness. How could you possibly think, if you were leading a movement towards freedom, that allowing yourself to be killed would achieve your aim?
 - But *'God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom.'*
- The educated Greeks in the marketplace just laughed at the idea. Just read the book of Acts!
- And crucifixion certainly does not speak to the current route to wellbeing, that of talking, pampering ourselves, taking exercise, and taking enough time off unless you consider the walk to Golgotha carrying your cross as exercise and the space whilst you're hanging on the rough wood as taking time off.
- *'Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified ...'*

- When Jesus stormed into the temple, brandishing a whip, shouting, and desecrating the holiness, he wasn't just making a statement about equality for all as all this temple finance was going on in the non-Jewish areas. He wasn't just complaining about tawdry economics and petty overcharging and theft replacing prayer and worship.
- For John, who places the cleansing of the temple right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, instead of after Palm Sunday, like his three colleagues Matthew, Mark and Luke, the temple episode is a sign about transformation, very closely linked to the sign of the wedding at Cana, which according to him was only 'a few days' earlier.
- Refresh your memories with what John says about the reason Jesus caused such mayhem and carnage. *'¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What **sign** can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰They then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹**But he was speaking of the temple of his body.***
- Jesus Christ says, 'I am now the place of worship. My body is the temple. And to quote a wellknown hymn, 'I'll live in you if you'll live in me'.
- That body of Christ is the same one that you'll receive if you are hearing this in church, in a few minutes time.
- That body is where the sacrifice for sins is now offered - not in the temple. That body is God offering everything he possibly can – how could he offer more? – to enable you and me to discover the healing power of the weakness of forgiveness.
 - You and I are worth it. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did it for us. Nothing was too much trouble. Doesn't that do you wellbeing a power of goods? Doesn't it raise your self-esteem if God really believes that you are worth saving?
 - And God saved his Son Jesus by raising him from the dead. And we are the body of Christ as he lives in us and shares our life in a physical way through communion. So God is saving us as well. Note, I said, 'is saving' rather than 'has saved'. We'll come back to that in a minute.
- The Jewish leaders responded to this blasphemous bad news by throwing the Christians out of the synagogues, even after the temple had been destroyed by the Romans.
- The Greeks responded with helpless laughter at the stupidity of it all. How could any educated person possibly believe that someone had come back from the dead?
- And today, Christianity is largely ignored as irrelevant and otherworldly with little to say about how to be successful or to pamper ourselves.
- *'but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.'* And I know which I find most fulfilling!
- This is very much a this-worldly set of readings. It is not talking about heaven as some airily distant destination after we die. It seems to speak to life today. It's about a work in progress rather than the completed things. 'being saved', rather than 'has saved'. Listen to the tense Paul uses in the following quote, *'¹⁸The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God.*
- We are *being saved*, rather than we've finally got there. Which when I consider my own failings is probably just as well. If God thinks he has finished his work of salvation in me, then he clearly doesn't know me very well at all! I'm a work in progress, but because I '*proclaim Christ crucified*', I know I'm on the way!
- Similarly anyone with an ounce of common sense would not suggest that God has already saved his physical creation especially with fallen humanity's effects on it with plastic pollution, burning of fossil fuels and pillaging of non-replaceable resources each making their own unholy contribution, like a money seller's table in the gentile court of the temple, proving dangerously destructive but especially so to the most excluded.
- There was a wonderful definition of God's Wisdom which I came across this week which I found especially stimulating. The wisdom of God is synonymous with the beauty of God's creation. Which implies that it is only when you care for God's creation that you begin to understand God's Wisdom. Not the wisdom of the Greeks endlessly debating but the Wisdom of God, endlessly creating.
- It's this idea which makes Paul's sentence especially prescient, *'the world did not know God through wisdom'*. Clearly today, the world still has not grasped the vital nature of preserving the beauty of God's creation, God's

wisdom. That's why God sent his son, Jesus. To resolve the problem of this sin. Tying creation and salvation indissolubly together.

- God will act to save his creation just as he is acting to save us. And we would do well to be ready for it.
- So you and I have to decide where we are worshipping. As redeemed human beings, with Jesus inside us, we are being saved. It takes the grace of God to perceive where we are worshipping and we have a head start because we understand the language. One of the many benefits of following Jesus today rather than waiting until we meet him at the judgement seat.
 - So to what extent are you still worshipping in the Jewish temple relying on the old economy of buying and selling in order to survive? Hoping that God will act soon, the pandemic will go away so that your way of life will be preserved?
 - To what extent are you more concerned with talking than doing. Discussing things in the market place like the Greeks and believing that your spirit is more important than your body?
 - To what extent are you so caught up in the unsustainable 21st century heresy of entitlement and wealth and comfort that you think God owes you a living instead of the other way round?
 - And to what extent are you prepared to make radical changes so that your life is more in harmony with God's wisdom, the beauty of his creation so that you will understand and be prepared to accept his loving Wisdom a little bit more?
 - What tables would Jesus turn over in your life?