

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew  
Glory to you O Lord.

<sup>24</sup> "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup> it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

<sup>26</sup> "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup> Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup> So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup> "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

<sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
<sup>36</sup> and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you O Christ**

So, hands up if you liked those readings, especially the one from Matthew? I looked it in the week I and I said to Gillian. What would you focus on? Her focus, she said, would be on this: "Do not be afraid, you are more value than *many* sparrows." With apologies, we're not having Gillian with her sparrows! The stuff about Jesus coming to set children against their parents - is pretty full-on isn't it? And what about these words from the mouth of Jesus: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace."

Today is a third Sunday of month and, in normal times, we would try and do something a little different. So I'd like to set the scene with a quiz. We've recently had a Fun-Key quiz and, on Thursday, Judith's ran an excellent quiz on Zoom. This morning's is short and simple. Eight pictures coming up on your screen, eight *trees* to name, multiple choice. So, how well do you know your trees? Don't worry if we go through quite quickly, we will see each one twice. (dial in)..... Put your hand up if you got all eight!

Picture quiz:

This is the picture quiz I hope to be using (on screen) on Sunday morning as part of the address.

1 Clue: It also has acorns



Ivy

Birch

Oak

2

It has small yellow-green flowers



Birch

Maple

Holly

3

This tree used to be associated with death as their trees can drop branches without warning



Elm

Cherry

Beech

## Considered the queen of British trees



(Photo: Andrew Hill/Flickr)

Beech

Alder

Maple

5 It has beautiful pink flowers



Birch

Lime

Cherry

6

## Favoured at Christmas time



Lime

Elm

Holly



7

## Not as sour as it tastes



(Photo: free photos/Flickr)

Orange tree

Lime

Cherry

8

The wood was burned to ward off evil spirits



(Photo: Andrew Hill/Flickr)

Birch

Ash

Beech



<https://metro.co.uk/2015/10/06/quiz-how-well-do-you-know-your-british-trees-5424091/>

1/3 2/2 3/1 4/1 5/3 6/3 7/2 8/2

Two more trees (I've have no idea what types these are!), the first is upright and living but is clearly damaged and scarred..... The second is even more battered and scarred.

We (of course) live in a world of hurt, where people are damaged and people are scarred. All of us bear some sort of scars from the past, there's no factory reset that clears all our memory. Some of us, I suspect carry deep scars from damage done to us or to our families, parents, grandparents .....

We are blessed ... with a God who shares our full humanity. For example he is scarred. Even the resurrected Christ – yes, made alive again, but still bearing the scars. Jesus invites Thomas to see his scars, to touch his scars.

Our world has many scars. And even if a scar is very old - when an event prods at this scar it causes pain, a pain that is only understood fully by those who bear this scar. One deep scar is that held by the black community because of slavery. One black man dies at the hands of the police in America and protests spread around the world, statues are pulled down and more people die. There are two parts to this reaction: One is to the recent death of one man, the other to the deeper and older scars left on a whole community by forced slavery.

I cannot *fully* understand this rage for I am not black. We should strive to understand as best we can not just the issues around slavery but the whole mechanics of being wounded, and how we and others carry sensitive scars that others cannot fully understand.

God in Christ carries deep scars beyond our understanding. Forgive me if I've told this story before: I was with a very young James towards the kid's corner in church. He was carefully watching John Chambers read the words of the Eucharist: "On the night he was betrayed", "This is my body". "This is my blood". James looked at me and said, "Jesus must have done something really bad!"

Jesus has a relentless drive for love.

Jesus has a relentless drive for justice.

Jesus does not have a relentless drive for peace. I have not come to bring peace.

What about Jeremiah: He is burdened with a word from God for the people of God. They won't like it and therefore they won't like him. Keep quiet, they say, keep the peace. But Jeremiah cannot keep quiet.

We also, we have the word of God, and a call to challenge hate and demand justice. If we are called to speak out and dare to do so we may be challenged, angrily, "how can you claim to be a Christian?"

Some scars are very deep. Those caused by slavery, those by the holocaust, those against children. The reaction is not simply against the person who has caused the wound, the person doing the damage. Even greater is the anger against the institution, the nation, the race, the big business, the church. What may seem (one day to be) a harmless word to the majority is like petrol on fire for those who live with a particular scar. They say they are sorry but clearly they do not understand, they are not listening, they are repeating the same mistakes and making new ones, prodding at the same scars.

There are no greater scars than those carried by God as he gazes down at us: We say we are sorry but clearly we do not understand, we are not listening, we are repeating the same mistakes and making new ones, prodding at the same scars. Yet our God is still mindful of us, Jesus invites Thomas to see his scars, to touch his scars.

The lack of peace in recent protests and riots is unsettling. I cannot fully understand, I am not black, but I can learn more. Two startling facts from the last six months: The abolition act of 1833 paid off those who were to lose their investments. The payments to pay off these government loans were finally completed in 2015, 5 years ago. And also, this week, the church was surprised that amongst those who were paid off were 96 clergy, including a bishop. If that seems a long time ago the scars clearly remain today.

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His anger is not on those who hammer nails into his ankles and his wrists: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." His anger is against the white washed tombs, those who claim to represent God, those who make the rules, those who set the limits on where God is, those we decide for others how they are to access their God, those who put God in a box, and slam the lid shut.

The good news is that there is no nation, no race, no government, no church that can possess and enslave our infinite God. His scars he took for you, his love is always for you. We have all damaged each other, ourselves and our God. And God will not sit quietly by and do nothing all in the name of keeping the peace. But whatever scars we have inflicted on the hands of Christ these same hands will forever be reaching out for us.

I invite you to read or listen to today's gospel reading again and keep this phrase in your minds: Whatever scars you have inflicted on the hands of Christ these same hands will forever be reaching out for you, for you are of more value than many sparrows.