

Commissioning Julia Denny-Demetriou All Souls St Peters 18.7.19

Micah 7.14-20

Ps 43

Gal 6.6-10

- One of the things about starting something new is that we don't really know how its going to go. We might have done our research or our due diligence but while that can help there are no guarantees.
- Maybe the new thing is a new appointment like Julia's tonight. Maybe the new thing is a new parish priest like is the case for this parish. Or it may be a new hobby or a new sport or a new school or a new house or a new responsibility. All sorts of things in our life are new as we go along.
- It's natural to look forward when are starting something new or facing a new challenge, and sometimes when we do look forward we feel uncertain, we might even feel anxious.
- The first reading tonight was from the book of the prophet Micah and Micah was looking forward. As he looked forward though things were not looking too good.
- Micah lived a long time ago-in the 8th century before Jesus Christ, and he lived and worked in the kingdom of Judah in the middle East.
- Judah's neighbouring country Assyria was very powerful and wanted to take over Judah. When Micah was active as a prophet Judah had avoided a total invasion by paying large amounts of money to Assyria to keep them at bay and Micah could see a lot of problems in the future.
- Micah also thought that at least some of the problems his country was having was its own fault-the result of bad decisions that had been made. The result of the nation forgetting God and turning away from trusting God.
- There was one thing that kept Micah going though, and that was the character of God. Micah knew that God was very trust worthy and that God was loyal to the promises he made. Micah knew that God loved the people of God and so Micah knew that there was hope and that in the end things would be ok.

- Tonight's reading from the writings of Micah contains some of that hope. And so, the second half of tonight's reading includes these words, and these are directed to God: 'who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old'.
- The same kind of idea comes out in the psalm we had tonight and especially the last verse: 'O put your trust in God: for I will praise him yet, who is my deliverer and my God'.
- The clear message is that God can be trusted all the time. God can be trusted to bring us through. God can be trusted to keep his promises.
- This does not mean that we don't go through difficult times or challenging times or unfair times. Some of the hard times we go through just happen. It seems that part of living in this world is that sometimes things happen to us that are difficult or bad or unfair. God is not like some kind of a shield who stops anything bad or scary or challenging happening to us.
- Sometimes of course bad things that happen to us are caused by us or we contribute to them happening. We do things or don't do things. We make decisions that lead to difficulty. That happens too. The second reading the one from Galatians has that kind of idea when it says you reap what you sow. Sometimes we do make decisions which we later regret and we have to deal with the consequences of those decisions-that's the way it is.
- Even then though God does not leave us to our own devices or to struggle through all by ourselves. God will strengthen us and bring us through whatever is challenging us. Even if the tough space we are in is our own fault, God will not abandon us or forget us or leave us to suffer all by ourselves as some kind of punishment. That's not the way God is. And Micah tonight affirms that when he says that God 'will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot'.

- There are two things that we see in the readings tonight-first that God is trustworthy and will see us through the challenges and difficulties that sometimes life throws us.
- The second thing to notice is that there is a call to godly living in tonight's readings.
- Sometimes the tough times or the challenging times we have to deal with come as a result of our own unwise decisions. Sometimes we forget God. Sometimes we go against God. We don't live godly lives and sometimes there are bad consequences.
- So part of the call is for us as much as we can to try to live our lives as God wants us to live them. That is certainly no guarantee that all will be well, but it does take God seriously, it does treat God as God, and it may well help us to avoid some of the dramas that sometimes happen because we ignore what God knows to be the best way for us to live.
- This all speaks to us individually and personally and maybe also to us as a parish and as a church.
- Tonight, we are commissioning Julia as the next parish priest of All Souls at St Peters. Its very exciting. But we know that there are challenges for this parish. The congregation is fairly small. There are not huge numbers of people joining together for worship. The parish has a challenging time ahead and our response to that challenge is important.
- We could just give up and say the parish has no future so let's give up now.
- Or we could say we will just look after those who are currently part of the parish and we can do things which make us happy and we will keep going until we all leave or get too old to keep coming along.
- Or we could say- no its not all over at all and we are certainly not giving up. You can probably guess which one I would choose! Just in case there is any doubt-its option 3!

- As I think about these things I always keep in mind that in the year 1750 there were 16 people at the Easter service in St Pauls Cathedral London. 16 people in a huge Cathedral like St Pauls. That's all. Things were very grim. But there was no giving up. People prayed faithfully and kept on going with being followers of Jesus and God brought revival to the church in England.
- The church in some parts of the world today is growing very fast and is very strong and big.
- The church in some parts of the world today is shrinking.
- The church in some parts of the world today is very influential in its community.
- The church in some parts of the world today is being persecuted and its dangerous to be a Christian.
- There have been ups and downs in the life of the church ever since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to kick off the church in the first place. But God has remained faithful. God has remained trustworthy. God has been with his people.
- We don't know what the future of All Souls is. We don't need to. That's not our business.
- Our business is to remain faithful to God and trusting in God.
- Our business is to keep looking for ways to share in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ because Gods work is not over yet.
- Our business is to keep looking outward and engaging with the people who don't come to church and keep expecting God to bring signs of his kingdom- glimpses of light and life and love.
- Our business is to try to live holy lives as the people of God.
- And our business is to pray. Pray for growth. Growth in the number of people coming to faith in Jesus. Growth in the depth of our discipleship of Jesus. Growth in no strings attached discipleship. Growth in generosity in looking after and using all God has given us.

- Micah was looking at a pretty challenging future when he wrote . And it was challenging and difficult. That's the way things turned out. But God was faithful. God brought his people through. And we can trust God to do the same. We don't know the future and we don't have too. We know God who is trust worthy and we base our today and tomorrow on this God.
- You know the sign offs people put on their emails. It's the signature block I think that's what its called. One person I know puts on his signature block a quote from Saint Augustine that goes like this: pray as though everything depends on God and work as though everything depends on you. We do pray, we do trust in God. And we join in sharing in God's work and Gods mission.
- What the future will be we do not know. But we trust in God who is always trustworthy.