



COULD WE START AGAIN PLEASE?

A Pastoral Letter for the Teulu Asaph, 4th May 2020

From Bishop Gregory

Not the Bible, but Jesus Christ Superstar. When Lloyd Webber and Rice took their show based on the Passion of Jesus to the West End, they wrote a new song to go into the production. It was sung by Mary Magdalene just after Jesus has been arrested, and events are spiralling out of control. Mary catches a glimpse of Jesus during the trial and scourging, and sings:

I think you've made your point now
You've even gone a bit too far to get the message home
Before it gets too frightening we ought to call a halt
So could we start again, please?

I saw the show again recently on the video performance production put up on You Tube during the Easter weekend, and it's a poignant song, reminding us that when things get out of control, we all of us tend to rethink our actions, and wonder about how things could have been done differently. There's also a God dimension, a crying out to the Father asking for things to be different.

Well, the good news is that it can be. With God, we can always start again. It's called repentance, and figures rather largely in the message of the scriptures. I wrote last week about Jesus being ahead of us, in our future, and God calls us to repentance and faith – to start again - in our discipleship, in our societies, in our faith.

The first call to repentance comes with baptism, when we are called to put off the old, and put on the new clothes of God's Kingdom. Anglicans choose, like many other Christians, to do this on behalf of their children, having them baptised so that they're claimed for the Kingdom of God from the very earliest days of their lives, and it is not always followed through, although God often has a way of worming his love in. It took fifteen years for my baptismal faith to flare into life, and I still have to turn to Christ and start again from time to time. Repentance is a way of living, of bringing ourselves always back to God. "Grant me, O Lord, to make a real beginning this day, for what I have done so far is hardly anything." was a prayer written by Thomas a Kempis, one of the great late mediaeval spiritual writers, and it reflects in the writings of St Paul in scripture:

I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Beloved, I do not consider myself yet to have laid hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should embrace this point of view. (*Phil.3.10-15*)

I want to write further about what repentance might mean for our society and for our Churches, but for now, let's concentrate on where all change begins, with a change in the heart. Coronavirus has stopped our lives and our busyness. It has stopped our public rituals, whether they be our worship, our shopping, or our socialising. But we still have time to turn to God, and think about how to do our faith differently. If Jesus was calling us for the first time today, what would we want to do differently? Could we start again please? May the Lord bless you with the opportunity to reset your own faith in this out-of-joint season,

+Gregory Newman