

THE EMMAUS SERIES

4th Sunday of Lent, Year B

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

The Son of Man must be lifted up, so that we may have eternal life in him

There is often a time in a long journey when we find the going hard. The enthusiasm with which we set out has faded, and there is still a long way to go. At this stage in our Lenten journey we may be inclined to identify with Nicodemus of today's gospel – not daring, as a well known Pharisee, to consult Jesus openly, he came 'by night', weighed down in his heart, no doubt, by an interior darkness of confusion and embarrassment.

In our disappointment with our lives, the darkness seems so real and overwhelming. The first reading, telling the story of old Israel – a story of unfaithfulness, stubborn selfishness, destruction and exile – reminds us how often human history has been filled with darkness, right down to our own day. In the second reading from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul confidently confronts this darkness: for him reliance upon false and selfish securities is to embrace 'death'.

If we are inclined to feel demoralised at this point in our Lenten journey, we are invited by today's readings to find again the source of new energy and encouragement. In the midst of the deepest darkness the true Light shines! Old Israel finds that God's designs will not be frustrated by their foolishness and selfishness - the conqueror of the Babylonians sends them back to rebuild the temple. Paul announces to those who are in danger of losing their way the astounding truth at the centre of our faith - God's free gift to a lost world of new life in Christ: our redeemed humanity is God's 'work of art', we each have our part to play in the realisation of God's great designs.

But it is especially in climax of today's readings, the words spoken to Nicodemus, by Jesus - the Light of the World - that all our darkness is dispelled! These words are perhaps the most quoted of the Gospels. Let us not take them for granted, but take them to heart and rejoice in the new life they bring: 'God loved the world so much that he gave his own Son, so that everyone who believes in him ... may have eternal life'. A world weighed down by the darkness of failure and selfishness must know, Jesus says, that he came from the Father, not 'to condemn' but to bring reconciliation and life.

As we take our bearings in the middle of a long journey, we often find new purpose and energy. Reflecting at this point in our journey of Lent, on the burdens we carry, can bring us to find again, in a more personal way, the essential truth of our Christian faith, the great truth we are celebrate at the end of our journey.

John Thornhill sm