

No Spiritual Leap-Frog!

Jeremiah 31³¹⁻³⁴; Psalm 51¹⁻¹³; Hebrews 5⁵⁻¹⁰; John 12²⁰⁻³³

And what should I say - 'Father, save me from this hour'?
No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. [John 12²⁷]

I am not generally an overtly emotional person: I was brought up as a chap to believe that a stiff upper lip was a positive mark of character and I was one of the last generations of clergy to be taught that emotional continence is a strength.

One of the few times I remember almost letting my guard down was in the last Parish when, having cycled 180 miles to raise money for the re-ordering of the Church, we turned up the hill to the Church to hear the bells being rung and a large reception party waiting for us to congratulate us on not dying with the exertion!

It was the anticipation of that return home that kept us going up and down hills and through every weather conditions known to humankind - we looked beyond the immediate to find a focus to keep us going.

That is what is happening in Hebrews - it says: **although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.**

It is also at the heart of the passage from John's Gospel:

- ✦ Chapter 12 changes gear - as we do on this Passion Sunday - Mary of Bethany has anointed Jesus with perfume valued at a years wages or more, Lazarus - the human evidence of Jesus power over death - is the object of assassination; and Jesus enters Jerusalem, quite deliberately modelling himself on the great King David who entered Jerusalem in the same way and by the same route 1000 years earlier.

- ✦ The Greeks find Philip and say those heart-warming words, **Sir, we wish to see Jesus.** And now Jesus is looking beyond the events of the week to find the strength to get through. I can almost see Jesus hearing this and saying, *Right! You asked for it!* And then, saying, **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!** For Jesus, the gloves come off. Glory will come through death and resurrections so he says, **unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.** Jesus looks through the cross to the promise of resurrection and so can continue.

- ✦ Jesus speaks very honestly - **now my soul is troubled** and asks if his prayer should be **Father, save me from this hour.** But, again, Jesus looks beyond for inspiration and prays, **Father, glorify your name.** God's response - like thunder brings the steel for Jesus' nerve - **I have Glorified it, and I will glorify it again.** This gives Jesus what he needs: he knows that as he is **lifted up** there will be three positive effects: **the judgement of this world** - too many live as if they will never be brought to account, but Jesus is judge and jury on injustice; **the ruler of this world will be driven out** - the Devil now only has influence over those who allow him to have it, otherwise he is impotent; **I ... will draw all people to myself** - for here is the thing that motives God in the Father and the Son to get through Calvary, the promise of restoration and redemption.

Remember what I said last week about singing our faith: today we indulge that self-giving of God - *When I survey the wondrous cross; It is a thing most wonderful; I cannot tell; O love that wilt not let me; In Christ alone.* Sing these words - they will help you feel and know of what it is God gives us as a focus!

How many of us see the barriers and not beyond; we see the difficulties, the unwelcome experiences: what we need to see is what God has in store for us.