

Who is the greatest? How do we define greatness? Muhammed Ali, is quoted as saying he was, many people think they are, the disciples certainly did. The dictionary says greatness is the quality of being great; eminence or distinction, many people believe greatness is scandal, obscene riches which last and fulfil but a moment. But God does not see as the world sees.

It's not who rules the rotas, is not our place to be judge and jury, that is God's job. We have enough keeping ourselves in check without criticising others, or deeming them worthy or unworthy. Remember the man with the plank of wood in his eye, complaining about the speck of dust in his neighbours. So instead of pointing the finger at others, let's have a close look at ourselves, or as Michael Jackson put it, I'm starting with the man in the mirror.....

Jesus was a man of greatness but there was no need for showiness, bragging or one-upmanship, just the carrying out of his father's will. In fact Jesus criticized and clashed with the scribes and Pharisees for just that. A powerful message for us today, in an ever more corporate and media driven world where being noticed and headline grapping stories vie for front page status.

But should we all keep faith simple, is it possible in this day and age with so many opinions and so many people believing their biblical interpretation is the only one? How often do we proclaim the story of the cross, not its modern day connotations but just speak the words simply and let God do the rest. Too often we get lost in argument and forget the simple instructions of Jesus on the mount.

What is suffering? Is there a way to categorise it, the dictionary states it is physical or mental pain, so what is pain, pain is mental or emotional suffering. The two it seems are inextricably linked, the bible is full of stories of suffering and the world as we are only too aware shows it on a regular basis in graphic images and words.

The ancient barbarians got rid of sufferers in their societies, the Holocaust and Japanese POWs bought a new meaning to the word suffer. More civilized peoples have dealt more kindly with those who suffer.

At the time of his work Isaiah had lived through a time of peace where the two Israelite kingdoms were prosperous and at peace, although the predominance of wealth was enjoyed by the merchants and corrupt officials. Whilst Isaiah does not identify the suffering servant many would argue Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah and his death and resurrection.

No one asks to suffer but how do we treat those who are suffering? At the recent Diocesan Conference Loretta Minghella, Chief Executive of Christian Aid addressed the conference and gave an insightful overview of the work of Christian Aid, work beyond the red envelopes.

Where life operates on the edge for many people where over one billion people have less than \$1.25 a day to live on or £0.85 although it is argued that there are many areas researchers cannot access many who so the overall figure might be higher.

Wars and other violent conflicts have a devastating effect on research of any kind, halting studies, ruining infrastructure, and destroying records. Yet as in the time of Isaiah the financial elite have the power and in many areas corruption is rife. Often we talk about the loss of integrity but did humanity ever have integrity and will people such as the Isaiah be silenced or ignored when they stand up and say what these individuals and organisations don't want to hear, for example King Ahaz.

We all have our beliefs and ideas which we often stick to however we may need to re-evaluate and adapt our views and arguments as we develop, learn and grow. We can only do this if we go back to source, rather than let the chattering monkeys of the mind do their worst, sit back, let go and let God in to our minds, bodies and souls. Only when we let the Holy Spirit flow in us can we radiate it back to the world.

At the time of our reading today it was a popular belief the world was flat and covered with a dome where heaven was a place just above the sky. Now with advances in technology and teaching we know otherwise but why do we need proof, why can't we accept and believe. As Jesus said in the upper room 'blessed are those who believe without seeing'. Even if what we are hearing may seem impossible or ridiculous.

We all come from various backgrounds, life history and journeys, some straight forward and others a painful winding road, often caused by the

influence and consequences of others and it is in the gift or curse whichever way you look at it, that in our free will we can affect the lives of others and have huge impacts on their lives. Impacts we may never be aware of, instead of healing our words and actions can be corrosive or harming.

We may be called by God but with that calling comes responsibility and as St Paul tells us we are not to pass judgement on others.

Have we got the courage to go forward in a community modelled on the ideal of Jesus teaching, to live a life of good grace, loving one another and Jesus has loved us.

It isn't easy and there will always be people encouraging to veer away from that ideal, the only way we can even get close to it is in spending time in the presence of Jesus not just in time of anxiety but by making regular times to pray and be still with him and in turn we will be absorb his grace. When we need to deal with difficult or frightening situations, even if they may seem impossible. We need to face these issues the way Jesus did with grace, dignity and prayer we can help bring calmness and grace to a situation even if we cannot bring a resolution.

Jesus bought life and light to life to those he met and we need to do the same, by using the invisible power of his life bringing spirit to all those we meet in our words and in our deeds.

Amen.