

Week Five: Jesus calls us to live the gospel today

- 1. The criminal was in Christ's physical presence, and received an assurance of being with him 'in paradise'. In what sense can we be aware of the presence of Christ today? What do we mean when we say 'God is with us'?**

There are a wide range of ways that God can be present with us, and that we can feel his presence. They may range from the charismatic to the contemplative. For some God speaks to us powerfully in our engagement with the Bible, for others the profoundest presence of God may be experienced in the sacrament of Holy Communion. For many contemplatives God's presence may be felt through an acute and sometimes painful sort of absence. In part it may depend on our own personal spirituality – and it is unhelpful to say that one form of 'presence' is somehow 'better' than others. But what is certainly true for all Christians is that we believe that in and through Jesus Christ God has been present with humanity in a unique and special way. He is rightly named 'Emmanuel' – God with us. And in turn as passages such as Matthew 25:31 suggest, we can find Jesus – and thus the presence of God – particularly in the faces of human beings at their most vulnerable and suffering.

- 2. The criminal's life was turned around in a moment. How does God continue to change our lives today – and the life of our church? What part do we play in God's ongoing work?**

I sometimes feel that our problem, both as churches and individuals, is that of a loss of vision, of excitement about the possibility of change. At the heart of my own spirituality and theology is the story of Jesus' transfiguration – and a strong belief that the Gospels are telling us that this transfiguration is not complete until the whole world – indeed all creation – has shared in this process of transfiguration. I believe that the transfiguration holds together two important theological strands which are often separated but which need to be held together – namely the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Different Christians, including Anglicans, tend to focus on one or the other. I think that is to the impoverishment of our theology – and to the action in mission that needs to be inspired by our theology. The transfiguration, I believe, both assures us that in Jesus we see the glory of God incarnate – but the story also points us to and through the transforming possibilities of the cross. I have not got space in these brief notes to expand on this – if you are interested to discuss it further please contact me at clarea@uspg.org.uk

- 3. In this course, we have focused on God's daily mission. How can your church play its part in this mission, both locally and globally? What sacrifices might be required?**

Perhaps the key question churches need to ask themselves is 'what are we here for?'. William Temple once famously said that the Church was the only organisation that existed not for the benefit of its members – but for those outside the group. That may not be all that is to be said – I for one believe that there is a theological imperative for the church to be a worshipping community, with the praise and glory of God at the heart of its life. (But of course true worship will inevitably spill over and renew for mission those who worship.) Yet William Temple's principle is perhaps a good one to bear in mind and to use as a 'test' for our church life. To what extent do we prioritise those outside the boundaries of the local church community in our understanding of our overall purpose and *raison d'être*?

- 1. At the end of this course, we find ourselves at the beginning because 'today' – the present moment – is the only time we have. Reflect on how this course has changed your perspectives on engaging with God's global mission today.**

This one has to be – over to you! But remember that USPG is there to help you with resources, suggestions and ideas, both today – and tomorrow!