

Week 22 Ordinary Time – 2026

Jeremiah 20:7-9; Ps 62; Romans 12:1-2; Matt: 16:21-27

A few days ago I went for a walk in the early evening. I was taking advantage of it being slightly cooler, both for me and for Bruce. Sadly, Fred died a few months ago and I was getting familiar with our new family companion. As I passed through the garden allotments, turning up the path that leads between the school and the cemetery, Bruce began sniffing the air, and I heard a low voice:

It said *'That is not Fred'*.

I stopped and reigned in Bruce. *'No'*, I said, to the shadow beyond the line of sunflowers, *'and I do not think you are Mr. Fox.'*

'No', said the voice, *'I am Mr. Fox the younger.'*

'I am sorry for your loss', I said.

'Hmm', murmured the voice. I waited.

'I do not understand the cross', said the young fox. *'It confused my father, too. Why is it so important to you?'*

'Because it is everything in God's relationship with me', I said as I wrestled with Bruce to get him to sit down.

'Explain'.

'I will try.'

On Sunday we will read from Matthew's Gospel. Jesus tells his disciples that he has to go up to Jerusalem, and there he will die. Peter, quite understandably turns to Jesus and says *'This shall never happen to you'*.¹ Maybe he means that the disciples won't let it happen, maybe he means

that he thinks that Jesus needs to choose another course. Most likely he is just incredulous at the thought.

Jesus' response is fierce, real anger. He turns and faces Peter, - perhaps they were walking side by side - *'Get behind me Satan'* he says. Poor Peter, you can imagine his shock, the colour draining from his face. Only shortly before Jesus had called him the rock upon which he would build his church, and now he is being called Satan! The name Satan is from a Hebrew word which means 'Adversary.' Peter speaks because he feels that he is defending the one he loves, and Jesus turns on him and accuses him of being his enemy, of being an obstacle. Who would not feel utterly crushed?

Why does Jesus speak like this? Because the reason that he is going to Jerusalem is to fulfil his destiny, He is going to Jerusalem because he is choosing to go to the cross to die. This is why he has come into the world. It has already been prepared for him at Christmas. He will not deviate, or be tempted to deviate, from the path. He has been given it by His Father, and he follows it out of love for the Father. His Father has given the one he loves most over to the world. Think on that! We often talk about Jesus's sacrifice for us, for love of us, but before that He was the Father's sacrifice, He is given out of the Father's Love for us!

And here is something worth thinking on as well. The hill upon which Jesus will die is either on, or very close to, Mount Moriah, the sacred place in the book of Genesis where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac his son. *'Take your son, Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of*

¹ Matthew 16:22

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Moriah. There offer him as a burnt offering on one of the heights I will point out to you." This is the mountain where Jesus is heading. Here, from this ancient seat of sacrifice God is going to show - upon the wood of the cross that the Romans and the Jewish leaders *think* give them power – that he is going to give the world everything. Here is a love that goes beyond the horizon of our comprehension; A sacrifice that takes up the burden of all humanities sins, through all time, through all conditions and horrors, and offers us release. Here, where God said to Abraham , maybe 2,000 years before the time of Christ, ' I will not *take* your son', he says: 'I *give* you my Son.' It is a free offering. And Jesus responds, "I will be given! : , my suffering, my flayed back, my head crowned with thorns, my thirst, my wounded hands and feet, the spittle that runs down my face, my nakedness, my dignity, my abandon-ness, my pierced side, my mother, my death ... nothing is held back. This is my love for you... for them". This is why Jesus' response is so uncompromising to Peter. Love has to be fulfilled on Golgatha.

When Jesus says to his disciples, '*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*' the cross is not a sign to suffer for its own sake, - we are not mere stoics, there is no everlasting merit in that - we are not to seek how we can suffer in the same way: it is a sign to love the Father without measure as He has loved us without measure.' This is the cross that I know.

I stopped, a little out of breath.

'I see', said Mr Fox.

'I need to go and think', said he.

'Me too.' I said. 'I will see you again some time.'