**The Second Sunday of Lent: Sunday 28th February 2021 Sermon: The Ven Chris Hawthorn**

‘Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.’ (Mark 8: 35)

Six weeks ago today Alexei Navalny flew into Moscow with his wife Yulia from Berlin. He was promptly arrested on a trumped-up charge. Five months earlier he had flown to Berlin after an attempt to poison him on behalf of the Kremlin. His supposed crime was that he had proved to be an alternative to the Russian President at the next election. Since his return his supporters have taken to the streets – to be met by the full force of the Russian state, with many arrests. A fortnight ago his wife flew back to Berlin after being arrested herself.

Elsewhere in the world in Myanmar the army seized power after they had been defeated by the people. Again there have been protests in the streets, met with the full force of the army and water cannon, rubber bullets, even live bullets. Those words of Jesus come back to haunt us, ‘Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.’

In order that we may know and understand what is happening in other parts of the world, there are two groups of people who risk their lives. There are (1) journalists and media people who let the world know what is taking place. They place themselves often in danger of their lives. (2) There are the people like aid workers and medics who again risk their lives to help the people who are suffering and in need. Again we have the words of the Gospel: ‘Anyone who wants to be a follower of mine must renounce self. He must take up his cross and follow me.’ That is a challenge for us as Christians.

Journalists, aid workers, medics all have made a commitment (1) for the cause and spread of truth (2) out of compassion for those who cannot help themselves (3) to stop the spread of a deadly disease, as in the case of the pandemic Covid-19. This is a commitment that puts their lives at risk. It is also in a sense of deep trust – trust that they will all be able to do something worthwhile, but also trust that they will be able to return to life in a normal way. For those who have faith it is in a trust in a God who will see them through, whether in this life or the next.

These themes of commitment and trust run through all the readings set for today, this Second Sunday of Lent. In the Old Testament we heard of God making a binding agreement with Abraham. All three of the world’s great religions in the West, Jews, Christians and Muslims look back to Abraham as the first great man of faith. Abraham set out from his own land, from the city of Ur, for an unknown destination because he trusted that God would see him through and that this was what God wanted him to do.

In the New Testament reading we heard Paul taking up this theme of Abraham and his faith. It is a faith in which we share as we are prepared to put our trust in God. We are children of Abraham.

So we come to the gospel. Here faith is really put to the test. Jesus says to his disciples, as he says to us, the world is not a soft place. It demands commitment. It demands that we really do trust God as found in the person of Jesus. If we are to follow him then we have to learn to take up our cross. It means putting God first in our lives. It means that His truth and the gospel are more important than anything else at all. After all, ‘what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his life. What can he give to bring his life back.’ Truth, love, justice, compassion, goodness really do matter. We will only receive that fullness of life that Jesus came to bring if we put our trust in Him.

Few of us in this country and here in Haxby and Wigginton are likely to find ourselves in such desperate situations as those I mentioned at the beginning. What we need to do and can do each day in our prayers is to remember the commitment that we have made to God as found in the person of Jesus. That is the theme for the Second Sunday of Lent. It is about commitment and trust. As Christians we are committed to God as found in the person of Jesus. That is the way to life. That is the way to that eternal life to which we are called. Lent is the time to renew our commitment, mine and yours. Where will we be when this lockdown is over?