

Sunday 1st March 2026

Second Sunday of Lent – Evensong

Readings:

Numbers 21: 4-9

Luke 14: 27-33

God judges us by loving us!

Earlier this week, I was reading some writings by the last Pope, Francis, and in his writing, there was a line which struck me. God judges us by loving us.

Judgement is a difficult subject, and one which many in the Church might like to avoid thinking too much about. Love, is not. Love is a word that we hear every day. We can understand love on a human level. We are loved. Perhaps by parents, perhaps by a husband or a wife, perhaps by children, perhaps by many others, all of whom might love us in different ways. And as a Church, we know that God loves us.

But then, we come together this afternoon, and we hear our first reading from the book Numbers. Not only do we hear it, but on this first day of March, which if it wasn't a Sunday, would be the feast day of S David, Patron Saint of Wales, we hear it read so beautifully in Welsh.

In this reading, there does seem to be a slight lack of love. God's people have been many years now in the wilderness, and, after all this time, the food which has saved the lives of their fathers, has become perhaps a little boring, a little tasteless, a little repetitive, and the Israelites begin to whinge.

This feels like quite a profound moment. God who has led the Israelites out of Egypt, who has fed them for nearly forty years as they travelled towards the land which he has promised them, is suddenly complained about because the food is a bit dull and repetitive.

I wonder how many parents here can relate to that. To a child sitting at the dinner table refusing to eat a meal because it isn't the meal they wanted. I've always wondered what my children used to think would happen when they did this. Did they think that we would just roll over and give them something else to eat. Well if they did think that, I can assure you it never happened!!!

But it does irritate, or even hurt, the parent. Hours spent over a hot stove, and all the child can say, as I remember well when mine were younger, is that they don't like the end result. Not much love shown to the parent, that's for sure. And often not much love shown back to the child either. Eat it or you'll go to bed hungry – being the words I remember my mum speaking, and which I know I've spoken many times as well.

This we can relate to, but in today's reading, God does perhaps take this to a stage which most parents might not! When the Israelites wouldn't eat the food they were given, and complained about it, he sent poisonous serpents, who bit the Israelites, and as we heard, they died.

Well fortunately, that isn't the end of the story. When Moses approaches God in prayer, redemption comes from God. Just as, forty years earlier, when the Israelites complained against God for starving them in the wilderness, he gave them food to eat, now that they were dying, God gave them the serpent of bronze, and when those who were bitten looked on the serpent of bronze, they lived.

There is nothing about the serpent making them live. Nothing about some strange powers of magic, or worse still, some other God found in the serpent. The serpent is from God, a reminder of God's presence, and when the Israelites look upon the serpent, they are reminded of God's love, and once again, are saved.

God judges us by loving us! The Israelites can see the power of God all over again, but also that their death is not what God wants. Perhaps this is about the difference between judgement and punishment. Punishment sounds severe, and

although, let's be honest, so does death by a serpent bite, this is about redemption, about hope, about the serpent which reminds the Israelites of the love of God. Judgement over discipline. Judgement through love. God judges us by loving us.

But perhaps the love of God is not quite the end of the story. There is another connection which still needs to be made, and that is about our love for God. If we recognise God's love for us as being there as soon as we turn back and look for it, what about our love for God.

As the Church, as a community of Christians, our love for God is surely what drives us in life. Our love for God is what determines the way we live our lives. Our love for God is what makes the difference between rejecting him, as the Israelites did in the wilderness, and turning our hearts towards him.

Perhaps we could say, in this season of Lent, that it is our love for God which causes us to carry our own cross. It is our love for God which causes us to recognise that, although the life of the Christian is not always easy, it is a burden worth shouldering. As we heard in our New Testament reading, without carrying the cross, we cannot be disciples of Jesus Christ, and so we carry it. To carry the cross is not the easy way out. In fact, it is a slightly undignified pose on many levels. Choose to do what is difficult. Choose to bear the burden. Choose to carry the cross, when you could choose not to.

But if it is a difficult choice, it certainly is not an undignified one. It is the choice which speaks of love, love given and love received. It is what brings us to live the life that Jesus calls us to. He shouldered his cross, gave us an example, showed us how to love, and demonstrated once and for all, that God is willing to do anything for us.

What are we prepared to do for God? God judges us by loving us. God loves us so much that he, in Jesus Christ, carried his cross and died to redeem us. When we are judged, God loves us, and longs for us to turn, as the Israelites did, to look upon the serpent and remember that love he has for us. And when we do this, we begin to live the life that he calls us to.

That will mean something different for each of us, but for all of us it will mean shouldering the burden of our love for God, and doing those things which bring us close. It will mean doing those things which allow God and other people to know of our love for God, so that in turn, God's love, and other people's love, for us changes our lives. When we do go wrong, we are still loved. When we ask God for judgement, he judges us still, by loving us.

Perhaps very pertinent on this day, this first day of March, are the final words of S David at the end of his life. Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things you have seen me do.

What are the little things we are going to do, as we travel this Lent. What are the things which will turn us back to God? Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things you have seen me do.