

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 249

Good Friday 29th March 2024

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Please find below a talk that I gave at the Good Friday service today at St Mary’s Compton Pauncefoot. This is followed by some of the underlying scripture references.

Tristram

A reconstruction of Holy Week as seen through the eyes of a disciple

It had all seemed so perfect. A group of friends sitting down to a meal together to celebrate the great Feast of Passover.

We were friends who were as one in their heartfelt desire to follow and serve an inspiring and brilliant leader. Our loyalty to Him and to one another, we thought, knew no bounds. We were willing to follow Him even to death.

And what memories we shared of our time on the road with Him. Teaching you could not forget, healings all over the place, even someone raised from the dead.

And now the warm fellowship of a shared meal. What could be more perfect? What could possibly break us up?

True, there had been some signs beneath the surface that all was not quite right. Yes, we had to admit there had been a certain jockeying for position,

but then again aren't all groups like that? After all, you do need to know who is in charge. However, He hadn't seemed very pleased about this.

And our leader could be a bit pessimistic and gloomy at times and He didn't seem to take kindly to attempts to cheer Him up. But absolute perfection is beyond any of us and we all knew that when the crunch came, we would all stay together and absolutely behind Him.

And so, the news that there was a traitor among us came as a great shock.

Yes, it was Judas. Judas Iscariot who had been Identified during the meal. Yes, looking back at it, perhaps we had missed some worrying signs. He was always perhaps a little too concerned with money and always talking about it even when perhaps it was not entirely appropriate. But we had not liked to be suspicious. We had trusted everyone in our group without question.

Still at least we knew now who the traitor was. And we had someone to blame as Judas comes out at the head of a great crowd brandishing swords and clubs with the chief priests and elders among them.

Careful, we must now think of Judas in a completely different way from the rest of us. There is something different about him, there always was. We need in our thoughts to isolate him so that his disease does not infect the rest of us. Our loyalty must be unquestioned.

And yet had He not told us that we would all fall away? Again, we thought that He was being too pessimistic. Surely, we would not turn back on our promise to follow Him wherever He went.

And yet when the night came, we could not stay awake to pray. And when the crowd came with swords and clubs we could not stay. We were afraid and we all ran away.

Even for Peter, the bravest and best of us, even though he was able to follow from a distance for a while, in the end it did not work. He ended up flatly denying that he had ever known Jesus and then he broke down in tears. And that was the end of his journey.

And then there was nothing left of our precious community. It had been attacked by forces from without and destroyed by forces from within.

And this was the cue for a terrible violence. The swords and the clubs were just the beginning. They were followed by blows, insults, murderous abuse, cries for crucifixion and then indeed in the end the terror of crucifixion itself. No wonder darkness came over the face of the earth. The earthquake that followed just about summed it all up.

We saw the violence that lies just beneath the surface of everyday civilised life. The veneer was stripped away and what lay hidden beneath became devastatingly apparent. We were shocked by the brokenness and ugliness of what we saw.

And can all this be put together again? We can say 'I forgive', 'I'm sorry'. We can even give money in compensation for what we have done, to show that we really mean what we say. And yet that does not take away the pain and suffering. It may be the dead whom we wish to talk to, the phone we pick up may receive no answer at the other end. The missing are still missing.

And our story is the story of every broken family, every human enterprise destroyed from within, every nation at war with itself.

We cannot put ourselves back together again.

But God? Is there nothing that can come from God's side?

And then we remembered various sayings of His that we did not entirely understand, still cannot make sense of. Yes, He spoke of rising again but how? How could that be? At the very end of time, perhaps, just possibly.

And then when we think of the wonderful and exciting times that we shared together, is it possible that these might come again? But this time in a way that really is perfect, that really does last, that withstands any amount of pressure?

He spoke as we ate of a new commandment, a commandment to love one another. And this was based not on our own enthusiasm or loyalty however strong these might be. The source of this love was His love for us and His Father's love for Him. It would come through the Holy Spirit within us. And the Holy Spirit would not come unless He left.

All this was beyond our understanding. But perhaps what was broken can be put together again in a way that will last. Who knows?

But if there is to be reconciliation, a restoration of all things, then it can come only as a gift from God's side. Maybe this is something of what He was about.

We did all run away. But thinking about it, some people just kept going. They were not the obvious people, the ones we thought of as the chief among us. There were the women who stood at the foot of the Cross. There were the quiet people like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who suddenly found the courage to ask that Jesus should have a decent burial. There is something in that.

But is there more? Well, we do have the sense of unfinished business, of words and works which have yet to be fulfilled. We can't exactly call this hope, it certainly is not certainty. But nevertheless, it is a nagging feeling

we can't get rid of, a feeling that prevents us from declaring that all is now over and settled. And so, for the moment all we can do is wait.

Some scripture references

The traitor

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?"

He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so." (Matthew 26: 20-25)

The deserters

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered...'

Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." (Matthew 26: 31, 33)

Violence unmasked

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. (Matthew 26: 47)

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. (Matthew 27: 28-30)

When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (John 19: 6)

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. (Matthew 27: 45)

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split (Matthew 27: 51)

Reconciliation

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaiah 53: 5)

and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1: 20)

A new community of love

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13: 34-35)

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth (John. 14: 15-17)

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John. 16: 7)

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. (John 15: 9-10)

A decent burial

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews (John 19: 38-40)

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5: 2)