

Thought for the week

Palm Sunday 2020

Like most of us, I've had plenty of time to reflect on life these last few weeks. In particular, Holy week and Easter and how different it will be this year. We would normally mark the beginning of Holy week with the reading of the Passion Gospel in our churches. This year it would be the Passion Gospel according to Matthew. Out of the three gospels, Matthew's is perhaps the more challenging, longer and I think more emotionally charged than the other accounts of Mark and Luke.

I remembered reading Matthews Passion story as an Ordinand at Easter School. Easter School was the only time in the year when year's one, two and three came together for learning, prayer and of course socialising. I recall there was a lot of socialising.

That particular year, Easter School fell during Holy Week and one of the tasks for the week, although I'm not sure if 'task' is the right word, was that each cell group or prayer group were given a portion of Matthews Passion Gospel to read out loud to the others. The others included our tutors and visiting speakers at various times during the day, over the course of the week.

Bale and Co, my cell group, were given the final part to read before evening prayer on Maundy Thursday. Although moved by the previous readings, we decided this final reading needed real impact but how?

In the vast hall where we gathered to listen was a storage room with thick dark red velvet curtains, which could be drawn – why a sports hall had thick velvet curtains, I have no idea. It was perfect for the affect we wanted to create.

We sat unseen behind the curtain and when the lights were dimmed, began to read the final part of Matthews passion, unseen, but each speaking the words of the principle characters, Jesus, Peter, Judas, Pilot, the crowd until the final words Eli, Eli, lema Sabachthami.....

Afterwards, you could hear a pin drop in that vast hall. No one moved. No one moved for about ten minutes. When people began to emerge from the hall into the sunshine, it was clear people had been moved by the experience. One by one came they came, many said they felt drawn into the story. They felt they were there.....part of the crowd watching, as one by one, Jesus' friends left his side, turned their backs on him in his time of greatest need.

Reflecting on this moment eight years ago, I am very aware that I will need to tread lightly this week and temper my language as I reflect and speak on Jesus' betrayal and death. There are many people in this community and in many communities around the world who are not watching or hearing this remarkable story from the side lines. They are making their own 'passion journeys' towards the cross. I am referring to those who are ill, those who are mourning loved ones and those who are vulnerable and anxious.

There is no doubt that Holy week will be different, but already there is hope. Easter is already dawning on the horizon. Unlike Jesus, the suffering are not walking their journey alone.

People are reaching out with hands and hearts wide open, offering help. In some cases, risking their own lives, doctors, nurses and countless others.

I have been bowled over by the generosity of strangers offering to shop or stand for three hours outside boots to collect a prescription for those unable to go out. We hear daily on the news heroic stories of love and generosity.

Our challenge is when Easter finally dawns, and it will, is how we will sustain this love and generosity – love of neighbour in a new and different world and it will be a different world.

Amen.

If you have the opportunity, please do read Matthews Passion reading. Matthew 26: 14 to the end of Chapter 27. 'Passion Sunday' from St Lauence's Church, Scalby is also available on the Website – we did think about changing the title!

Revd Belinda