

Reepham Cherry Willingham and Fiskerton Churches Together

Holy Week Reflections Tuesday 7th April 2020

Encounters: Death or Glory? John 12:20 - 36

Welcome to the second in our series of Holy Week Reflections, based on John's gospel. Whether you are watching this at 12 o'clock or 7 o'clock or any other time I hope you will feel part of our Christian community in our three villages.

For those of you who don't know me, I am Margaret Roe, a retired Methodist Minister, living in Cherry Willingham and worshipping at Reepham Methodist when I am not taking services elsewhere.

Some of what I shall say comes from the Holy Week Bible Study by David Thomson, an Anglican Priest, a Journey with John, but I have adapted it and added a few thoughts of my own.

The passage for today is John chapter 12, verses 20-36.

Jerusalem was a busy city, but it became much busier and more crowded at the times of Jewish Festivals, such as Passover. Jews would travel long distances to celebrate. They would come not just from the surrounding countryside but from much further afield. You may remember in the story of Pentecost that Jews were gathered from all over the known world. And Passover was even more important to them. To travel to Jerusalem was regarded as a pilgrimage. Some of the Psalms are pilgrim Psalms which they would have sung as they travelled and as they entered the city. One census recorded by Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, counted more than a quarter of a million lambs sacrificed there at one Passover, which probably represented about two and half million people.

Those of you who have been to the Holy Land will know that Jerusalem is still a very busy city, crowded with tourists and pilgrims, wishing to retrace the steps of Jesus. For some it is just a holiday, others go with the hope of encountering Jesus Christ in a new way.

A prayer which is an invitation to encounter God p17.

And so we think about this encounter with Jesus, recorded in John.

Long with all the crowds, some Greeks had come for the Festival as well as Jesus and his disciples. Jesus had been greeted by the crowds as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey and no doubt everyone was talking about him. The Greeks approached one of Jesus' disciples, Philip, a man Greek name who came from the Greek speaking town of Bethsaida. Along with Andrew they bring them to Jesus although what Jesus says in the following verses appears to be for everyone, not just them.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Jesus knows that he has travelled to Jerusalem to his death. He repeats this on two more occasions, after Judas has left the meal to betray him and after his long discourse and prayer after supper. He then uses the imagery of a seed dying. "Unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many

seeds". I find that a very powerful image of what his death and resurrection will achieve.

Below are the words of a hymn. It is really an Easter hymn but picks up the imagery of the seed dying.

- 1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain ;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been :
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.
- 2 In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen :
- 3 Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen :
- 4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been :

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872–1958) (*alt.*)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 306

Words: © From *The Oxford Book of Carols*, 1928, Oxford University Press. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

At this time when we are isolated from each other, wondering what the future will hold, perhaps feeling that all is dead, those words offer hope that whilst our life is dormant at the moment, there will come a time when new life will appear.

John's gospel does not record Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane but his words here recall those words "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

And then we hear a voice from heaven "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again". Unlike the other gospels John has not recorded the voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus nor the transfiguration but he does so here, describing it as a voice like thunder. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the figure of Aslan, the lion in the Narnia chronicles. In the book Aslan's roar lends strength to those who believe in him but strikes fear and confusion into his enemies. And so here the voice of God goes unrecognised by many even though it was for their benefit, just as many will pass by his sacrifice on the cross.

The phrase "Death or glory" is the motto of the Queen's Royal Lancers. But for Jesus it is death and glory. Glory is a theme running through John's gospel. Right at the beginning of the gospel we hear the words "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth". Throughout the gospel, the miracles, or signs as John calls them are to reveal his glory. And his impending death is the ultimate way by which he would reveal God's glory.

David Thomson uses a lovely illustration of a candle. He says this. "We often light candles in church. Their purpose may once have been practical: it has always been symbolic. The pale waxy candle has the look and feel of death. Only as it gives itself away through the furnace of the flame does it speak of life. From the candle's point of view it is only sacrifice; it will be used up, spent. But beyond its imagining, if we can allow it for a moment a soul, there is light and life for others of a completely new order. See too how even a small flame can conquer an enormity of darkness. Its death is its glory"

Let's just pause for a few moments to look at the candle and reflect on the glory it gives through the sacrifice of its death and also the glory of God revealed in the sacrifice of the death of Jesus which brings light and life to all.

Silence

Picking up the theme of sacrifice from yesterday's reading of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with costly perfume we are invited to consider the sacrifices we might be prepared to make in order to bring glory to God.

David Thomson gives us some examples - some you may be familiar with. Shannon Wright, a teacher at a shooting in a school in America placed herself in front of a 12 year old girl to prevent her death and was killed herself.

Read 4 examples on p16.

It is unlikely that any of us are going to be called to sacrifice ourselves in extreme situations such as those.

But we are all making sacrifices at the moment, no meals out, no family gatherings, difficulties in getting basic necessities, unable to attend church, clubs, social activities or events. But we know they are sacrifices, not only to protect ourselves, but to protect others. NHS and other Health Care workers and those continuing working to provide us with the necessities of life are risking their own health and sometimes sacrificing their family lives by living apart from them whilst the lockdown lasts.

As we think about the sacrifice which Jesus made for us on the cross and the sacrifice that others have made in their life time I invite you to consider the sacrifices that God may be calling you to make in order to bring glory to God.

Silence

Paul says in Romans "I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present you bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship".

"Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overtake you. While you have the light believe in the light so that you may become children of the light".

Prayer

Go into the world, walking in the light,

Offering your souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice,
Bringing life and light to those around you,
Bringing glory to God in all you do.
And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you now and always. Amen.