

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – April 6 2020 (Monday of Holy Week)

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. We are making a pilgrimage through Holy Week, an online one - as we cannot meet in our churches. In each short podcast we begin and end with some music, reflect in a number of ways on Holy Week scripture, and pray. Details of music and sources are in the online transcript. Our scripture is all taken from John's Gospel.

Music* – 'Farewell to Stromness' opening theme composed by (and played by) Sir Peter Maxwell-Davies.

Scripture†: John 12.1-11

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about half a litre of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.[a]'

⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. 'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you,[b] but you will not always have me.'

⁹Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Reflection

Our reading for Monday evening actually comes before the account of the first Palm Sunday in John's Gospel. Jesus is with Martha and Mary, his friends; Lazarus their brother. And Mary does this slightly bizarre and very symbolic thing. Pouring expensive perfume over Jesus's feet.

Who knows how she was inspired to do this but it's obviously another sign to the disciples and other followers of Jesus that here was somebody special. It was effectively a sacrifice. What looked like a waste of money to Judas – and of course the Gospel-writer John is never slow to criticise Judas – what seems a waste of money to Judas is indicative of what is coming up. The sacrifice is being made to Jesus ahead of his death which is himself being sacrificed.

The chief priests, the religious authorities are looking on through all of this. And the significance is not lost on them. Jesus becomes once again a major focus not just of interest but even of worship. This won't do. No wonder they wanted to do away with him.

And John mentions they'd rather like to be rid of Lazarus as well, Lazarus resurrected being such potent evidence of just how special Jesus was.

At this point in Holy Week we look forward across the whole sweep of the story of Jesus's last days. If we hadn't been prevented we would have gathered at the Holyhead Road church this evening and watched a film about it with the Girls' Brigade.

We look forward, knowing what is to come, knowing the ups and downs that awaited the disciples and Jesus himself. This was not an easy road, as this meditation acknowledges:

Meditation‡

He will walk, a little in front of us, towards Jerusalem. He will not be scared, even though we are apprehensive. If we try to discourage him, he will recognise the devil in our voice, and he will tell us so, in no uncertain terms. Then he will go on again, in faith, towards Jerusalem.

*Wonder and stare; fear and beware;
Heaven and hell are close at hand
God's living word: Jesus the Lord
Follows where faith and love demand*

He will walk, a little in front of us, into controversy. He will not be scared, though we are apprehensive. He will argue with the intelligent, contradict the self-assured, embrace the untouchable, upset bank balances by his outlandish behaviour in the sanctuary and weep in public. Then he will go on again, in faith, towards a garden.

*Wonder and stare; fear and beware;
Heaven and hell are close at hand
God's living word: Jesus the Lord
Follows where faith and love demand*

He will walk, a little in front of us, into Gethsemane. . He will not be scared, though we are apprehensive. He will sweat blood, and ask God if there is another way. And when God says "No", he will take the traitor's kiss, the soldiers' spit, the bile and venom from the princes of religion. Then he will go on again, in faith, towards the cross.

*Wonder and stare; fear and beware;
Heaven and hell are close at hand
God's living word: Jesus the Lord
Follows where faith and love demand*

He will walk, a little in front of us, towards Calvary. . He will not be scared, no, he will not be scared.

He will feel the pain of wood and nails. But, more than this, he will feel the weight of all the evil, all the malice, all the pettiness, all the sin of the world heaped on his shoulders. He will not throw off that weight, though he could.

He will not give back evil for evil, return malice for malice, take revenge on the petty-minded, or spew out hate on all who have despised and rejected him.

He will not give back the sin of the world, he will take it away into death, into hell, so that he can lead us into heaven. Then he will go on, in faith, towards the resurrection.

*Wonder and stare; fear and beware;
Heaven and hell are close at hand
God's living word: Jesus the Lord
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He will walk, a little behind us, through the graveyard. He will wait, until we are sure he has died, and admit our complicity in his life's ending. Then he will come up behind us and say our name, so that we can say his, forever.

*Wonder and stare; fear and beware;
Heaven and hell are close at hand
God's living word: Jesus the Lord
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Prayers

*Ride on! ride on in majesty!
The angel-armies of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.*

Mindful of the sacrifice of Jesus, we pray:

Jesus you gave yourself. You prepared to give yourself. You allowed more and more of your true nature to be seen, to the point where some of those closest to you saw the truth.

They could not help but see in you the Son of God, that others did not believe could possibly be among them. They could not help but worship you.

And then you set out on that last journey, to and into Jerusalem. Despite the outcome you knew would be. Despite the prospect of pain, the certainty of death.

And all of this so that you could bridge for us the gap that had opened up between humankind's vision of God and the reality. God so loved **us** that he sent **you** – not to condemn us but to save us.

As we explore how that can be, this Holy Week; as we walk behind you into and through all of its experiences, give us a fresh insight and in the end a fresh resolve to deserve what you have given, to show and share your love.

The world today needs a sharing of love. Be with those in peril during this emergency; be with those who are ill and those who care for them, those who are anxious and those who keep society going, those trying to make the right decisions today and every day.

We worship you, God and Son of God, and offer our prayers to you in your name.

Amen

Music – *'Farewell to Stromness'* opening theme

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† Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition

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