

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – April 7 2020 (Tuesday 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* – *Cora*, music by Randy Edelman from the soundtrack of the film *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Scripture†: John 12.20-36

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

²⁷ 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!'

Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up^[a] from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

³⁴ The crowd spoke up, 'We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain for ever, so how can you say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this "Son of Man"?'

³⁵ Then Jesus told them, 'You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ³⁶ Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.' When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Reflection

This theme of darkness and light, and light overcoming darkness was there at the beginning of John's Gospel in my favourite Christmas scripture. John 1.5: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

My Bible tells me that an alternative translation could be that the darkness has not *understood* the light. Consider the passage that we have just heard. I have to say that Jesus doesn't go out of his way to be crystal clear, but for sure the crowd don't understand. The religious authorities didn't understand. Jesus brought a new interpretation of the Law that they couldn't grasp.

I remember, in the Disney film *Beauty and the Beast*, the mob singing '*we don't like what we don't understand, in fact it scares us*'. That's exactly the attitude that has fuelled the actions of lynch mobs down the years, and certainly a big part of what motivated Caiaphas and his associates to hound Jesus and, as we have been told a little earlier in John, plot to find him on his own and seize him.

God's voice is heard. This isn't reported often in the Gospels. We think of the affirmation of Jesus's status at the time of his baptism, again on the hill top at the Transfiguration. This one – Jesus says it is not for his benefit but for the crowd. Again a misunderstanding, and the crowd didn't know what they had heard. I am sure however that Jesus once again felt affirmed. He had just mused on his own position: ²⁷*'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.*

It is almost a trailer for his doubts, his agonising doubts, in the Garden of Gethsemane: *If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.* This time there is an answer from God to Jesus's resolute determination to continue. In the Garden there would be none. It is as if there were a series of break points where Jesus could take a different path. But he said it had to be, and through his willing sacrifice he would shed the light on the darkness that the world needed.

The world needs light in the darkness right now. As I prepare this, the sun is shining and all the signs of spring are leaping out of hiding. But the shadow of the Covid-19 virus seems to be visiting every nation in turn. The statisticians and epidemiologists of the future will feast on the data showing the chain of cause and effect. We wait from day to day to see the right way forward, the appropriate way to contribute to the future of our country and even of humanity, when individually we sometimes feel so puny. At times our best recourse is to pray, as the German poet and novelist Goethe is said to have done in the end: *'more light!'*

Prayers

As we pray, we can borrow some words from the sixteenth-century Book of Common Prayer, Archbishop Cranmer's adaptation of a much earlier Latin prayer:

"Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Jesus said, *Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going.* We pray for those who are trying to steer us through this time of darkness. We pray for those who keep us all moving in the right direction. And we pray for those who are looking for a light to guide and to illuminate. And where we fall, we pray for those who try to catch us and save us from harm.

Lord we have never experienced this before. We lack any precedent for the self-isolation and the 'social distancing', separating friends from friends, family from family, preventing habitual gatherings for recreation, entertainment or worship.

We look for the calm assurance that Jesus had, that however dark the path, it is the right path. We look for patience with protective measures, caution to avoid assuming we can relax the rules or break them.

And we ask a blessing on the work of nurses, doctors and other hospital staff, GPs and pharmacies and the huge support network enabling healthcare in this country. We pray for the emergency services, police trying to enforce safety rules. Give them strength and courage. Be with those whose role is to source and supply the right equipment.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this period of pandemic that threatens and afflicts us, our families and friends, our community, our country, all humanity; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

Music – Cora

* All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

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