

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"The Man of Vision and the Fear of Change".

Hymn:

Reading: Isaiah 53. 7 - 9

Prayers:

Scholars tell us that this passage was not at the forefront of the thinking of Gospel writers when they came to tell the story of Jesus death.

One can't help but wonder whether Jesus himself had this passage in mind as he began the final days of his life?

There's no evidence that he did yet one can not help but thinking of the remarkable similarities between what happens to Isaiah's "suffering servant" and the fate of Jesus himself. Perhaps, it is simply that there are patterns of God's activity and they are repeated generation after generation.

Isaiah says of the servant, "***He was oppressed and afflicted.***"

Time and again in history those who act in the name of God suffer at the hands of others, and very often at the hands of those who bear the same name as themselves. In York, in the ancient road called the Shambles, is the house where Margaret Clitheroe lived. She was a Catholic and on March 14, 1586, she was charged with being a Catholic and of hiding Catholic priests in her home. She replied, "I know of no offense whereof I should confess myself guilty. Having made no offense, I need no trial."

Because she refused to stand trial, the penalty was death by crushing. A board was placed on her and huge stones were laid on top. She was dead within 15 minutes.

How come we human beings are so blind to what is of God?
How can Christians who had the Gospels with all that Jesus has to say about the way we should treat one another then crush Margaret Clitheroe or, under the Catholic Mary, burn at the stake the Protestant Martyrs in Oxford?

How come, that the Jewish leaders of 2,000 years ago, men who knew the scriptures and the law, could have failed to recognise that in Jesus they were in the presence of one who was offering them a rich gift from God?

"By a perversion of justice he was taken away!"

Certainly the way the Gospel writers tell of what happened to Jesus there is little sense of fairness. The verdict had been decided before the Sanhedrin met. He was to be killed and the Roman governor was to be forced into giving his imprimatur to their wishes.

The best one can say is that at least there was some form of judicial process.

In the world's jails are many people who have been through some form of legal process but whose conviction was predestined. Prisoners of conscience have often been tortured and then processed through an unfair court process.

Time and again these are the people who have a different vision from those with power, sometimes a profound vision, sometimes totally whacky. Whichever, it's a vision the powerful find disturbing and threatening and so they determine to root it out.....

Jesus is at one with all those who have a different vision and who speak and act in ways that challenge the status quo, the way things have always been done. Jesus challenges me because I tend to be a conformist.

Like the chief priest I value tradition, the wisdom and the insights that come from the past. I tend to be suspicious, even threatened, by the new, often wishing it would go away. "Change" isn't one of my favourite words.

All this gives me a terrible fear that I might have sided with the chief-priests and Pontius Pilate if Jesus had been brought before me.

The challenge many of us may face in our Christian lives and especially in this Holy Week is to see in the carpenter, teacher, healer the man who has the vision which can only come from a true Son of God.

In our country, many have decided that Jesus is a man of no account, a man who can be dismissed from history. So it's left to you and me to declare that Jesus is the true "suffering servant" who has come from God to give life to the world.

As Isaiah says about another servant of God, he gives life to others through being faithful to God even unto death.

Christ crucified is the faithful witness to God and a challenge to us all!

Amen.