

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 251 All for Jesus

Reading: Mark 15. 1-15

Prayers:

On Sunday there was a television programme about “Jesus, the Jew” which was fronted by Harold Jacobson.

It was a fascinating programme and though one might have quibbled here and there; there was no reason to argue with the central point. Jesus was Jewish through and through and though he may have been radical in his thinking it was always within a Jewish context.

The great tragedy of the Christian Church over the last 2,000 years has been the way it has blamed the whole Jewish people for the death of Jesus. The notorious words from St. Matthew’s Gospel when the whole crowd before Pilate cries out:

“His blood be upon us and on our children!” has resulted in the persecution of Jews through the centuries. The film showed us the Norman Keep of York Castle where in the twelfth century over one hundred Jews fled for safety during the anti-Jewish riots.

They were all murdered.

The holocaust in the 20th century was the terrible culmination of centuries of anti-Semitism which had at its roots the Christian determination to blame the Jewish people in general for the death of Jesus.

All the Gospel writers tend to put the Roman Prefect, Pilate, in the best possible light, perhaps because they had to live out their life in the Roman world.

In this Gospel, Pilate doesn’t proclaim Jesus to be guilty of any offence. Indeed, he appears to regard him as innocent. His only task is to authorise the punishment which follows from the guilt which has already been decided upon by the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin.

We see Pilate trying but failing to save Jesus by getting the agreement of the crowd that Jesus should be released by him as part of a Passover amnesty.

This picture of Pilate seems unlikely. Roman governors were not known as men who could be easily swayed and Pilate had a reputation for cruelty and ruthlessness.

He was described by the Jewish writer, Philo as an “inflexible, merciless and obstinate” man, not the sought of person to be swayed by a crowd.

Indeed, the very presence of a large crowd has sometimes been seen as unlikely.

Yet, what we do know is that the Jewish leaders did want Jesus killed and Pilate must have authorised his death. However that came about it probably does all centre around that central question that Pilate asks Jesus:

“Are you the King of Jews?”

For the Jewish leaders, those words ask the question as to whether or not Jesus is the Messiah, the King and Priest sent from God. For Pilate the question is whether Jesus is a rebel leader who is a danger and threat to Rome.

Behind both these questions is the challenge which continues into our own day.

- In Jesus, do we see one who comes from God in order that we may know the nature and will of God?
- In obedience to Jesus' way of life and at one with him are we reconciled to God and to each other?
- In Jesus do we find a man who in the name of God challenges the values of this world and the rulers of this world as to how we should live and act?

When Jesus is asked by Pilate, “Are you the King of the Jews?” his answer is noncommittal, “You say so?”

He stands there before his accusers and invites them to make up their own minds.

As we watch Jesus before his accusers we, too, have to make up our minds. If we say that Jesus is “King” then we must live as his friends and share in that way of life that he wants of us, members of God's awkward squad for the sake of the world He loves.