

Tuesday in Holy Week

Welcome to this series of thoughts and questions. We are making our Journey with the Disciples and all followers of Jesus to the foot of his cross.

A prayer for today.

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

John 12:20-36. Jesus Predicts His Death

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

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

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

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

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. 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.

Some thoughts and questions from Malcolm.

That is the great question: ‘How do we see Jesus?’ and with it how do we understand and experience God? In this Bible passage we have both the question and the enigmatic answer. It is a search which never ends, which has occasional moments of illumination and long periods of questioning and searching. Sometimes God in Jesus seems very close and at other times faith and answers can seem hidden and remote.

In our family we have an aspiration which arises from our over 40 years of visiting Sweden. It is to make the journey through the Gota Canal. It links Gothenburg to Stockholm, joins the North Sea to the Baltic. But it is not one canal it is a series of canals with stupendous series of locks which join the many lakes for which, together with vast forests makes that country so beautiful.

That journey would be like our journey of faith. Sometimes smooth uplifting times - gliding across calm lakes, sometimes steep gradients where help has to be given to navigate the many series or ‘ladders’ of locks. On the journey we pass a monument to those who built it and who still inspire. Always significant for us between Motala (the home of the Motala Motor Museum) and the Borrensborg Locks is a striking monument. It is to Baltzar von Platen the Swedish driving force for its construction and Thomas Telford, the Scottish Engineer who came across with expertise and engineers to help.

In Holy Week we and the disciples have to learn to ‘see Jesus’ in different ways. Each year we can think about the different times of calm and inspiration and the times when we have need help to get through our own lock gates. As we cannot meet together it is a time for us to think about those who have helped us through our own times of turbulence and in their own way have shown us another aspect of God in Jesus.

Can we see Jesus all on our own? Or do we need guides and helpers? Grace Davie is the person more than any other who has helped many of us to understand churchgoing in Britain and across Europe. In her first book, she used a phrase which almost instantly ‘caught on’ it was ‘Believing without Belonging’. In these days when ‘belonging’ is to a virtual community it is even more important to value our own communities and to see how our faith has been supported and deepened by those who have guided us, and who still guide us, on our way.

Poem chosen by Malcolm.

Ordinary God by Donald Davie

“Do you believe in a God
who can change the course of
events

on earth?”

“No, just
the ordinary one.”

A laugh,

but not so stupid: events

He does not, it seems, determine
for the most part. Whether He
could

is not to the point; it is not
stupid to believe in
a God who mostly abjures.

The ordinary kind

of God is what one believes in
so implicitly that

it is only with blushes or

bravado one can declare,

“I believe”; caught as one is

in the ambush of personal history,
so

harried, so distraught.

The ordinary kind

of undeceived believer

expects no prompt reward

from an ultimately faithful

but meanwhile preoccupied
landlord.