

## Tuesday of Holy Week 2021    John 12:27-36 (NRSV)

<sup>27</sup> 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' <sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. <sup>34</sup>The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' <sup>35</sup>Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

We had the first part of this passage on Passion Sunday— strictly speaking we should have had both sections at both services, but I split them and used half on each occasion to avoid a repetition.

I expect we have all had moments in our lives when we have wanted to escape whatever lies ahead. However, none of us will have faced a challenge on the scale of what Jesus faced before his trials and crucifixion. The scene has some parallels with the story of his baptism, told in the other gospels – Jesus resolves to do what he knows his Father wills, and a voice from heaven affirms him. This time it is not his identity as God's Son that is being affirmed; it is what he is embarking upon.

I want to pick up on 2 words in this rather mysterious account: glory and light. As we saw yesterday, John's gospel regularly uses the word 'glorified' to refer to Jesus being crucified, which on the face of it is rather strange. Is it glorifying death, or suffering, or even setting off on what must have looked like a suicide mission? Clearly that is not what is meant, although Jesus is conscious that the outcome will result in his suffering and death.

In the Old Testament, the glory of God was a shining presence which human beings were not usually permitted to see. In the book of Exodus, Moses meets with God on Mount Sinai to receive the law, and when he comes down, he is recorded as still having a kind of residual glow, such that they veil him for a while until it calms down (Ex. 34:29-35). He has spent time so close to God, that something of God's glory has lingered with him. Glory and God's presence are very closely related ideas here. If God is present, then his glory can be discerned, and it has a powerful effect on those who encounter it.

Of course, in the person of Jesus, people were encountering the presence of God all the time, and not necessarily knowing it. What Christians call the Incarnation – God fully present in Jesus – means that the presence of God was focussed in a special way, not in clouds on mountains or in sanctuaries and shrines, but wherever Jesus went. And in John's gospel, that presence of God becomes evident in a way that impacts people at the very moment you would not expect – at his crucifixion. That's why John records Jesus on two occasions (3:14 and 12:32) referring to being "lifted up". Here he speaks of that drawing people to himself, earlier it is so that all who believe may have eternal life. And that is why the passage uses the term glorify – at that seemingly God-forsaken moment when Jesus is on the cross, God is actually most present, his glory is most on display, and He is working out his purposes in the world. There may not be flares of light, but that presence will transform and impact people. We might compare Mark's gospel recording that the centurion in attendance says "truly this was the son of God".

And I think that is important to carry into our lives too. We might feel tempted to think that God is most present in churches or sanctuaries, or in times of worship and prayer wherever they are. He is, of course, present there, but he is also present in the street, the refugee camp, the soup kitchen, in people's homes,

even in the workplace. Perhaps the lesson here is that he is also very present when people suffer, even though they themselves might perceive God as very distant or even absent.

Related to that are Jesus' references to light. The glory of God had been perceived as light, but now he points to a more inner quality. He dares to speak of himself as the light of the world, and that light coming into the world works as a kind of judgment. When you shine a light on a situation, you reveal the truth about it. For some that is welcome; for others it is something to fear – and that is precisely what happens with Jesus in Holy Week. The powerful elite are threatened by his truthfulness about them, about God, and about himself.

It might seem surprising that Jesus also tells his disciples that they are lights for the world. The light (which is actually the source of true life that shines in his life) can even be perceived in those who follow him. Sometimes when I've been driving on the motorway – or over the moors to East Riding crematorium, my car gets pretty grimy. The lights sometimes need bit of a clean to stay efficient. Our light is often obscured too – with our own concerns, our own fears, our own agendas, our own selfishness. But Jesus encourages us to believe in the light that we may become children of light. Staying with him means something can rub off on us – rather like Moses' face glowing in the days of old.

I have known a few people where, despite all that life had thrown at them, some light still shone in their faces. The light of Jesus isn't a protection or insurance from the difficult challenges of life, but it is a reassurance. Not just a comforting word, but an inner strength that can sustain and carry us through thick and thin, if we stay open to receive his light. And I think that's what happened with the people I think of - the light shone into and through them, and by doing so brought light to others.

May we receive the light of Christ this week, and may we be clear enough lenses for others to receive light from us. **Amen.**