

Pivot Point - Maundy Thursday 2023

The next few days are busy ones for us, and I don't want to spend too much time spoiling the drama of the readings and the inexorable, trudging, forward momentum of Jesus' passion. I would rather you spent the time engaged in your own prayers and meditations on this critical moment of the story - which we know actually happened, as we have established that the eye-witness accounts of the gospels are verifiable and accurate.

I have said before that I don't believe that you can really experience the true joy of Easter morning without having accompanied Jesus through his 'dark night of the soul,' which is at its most acute tonight, at the Last

Supper and in the Garden of Gethsemane afterwards.

This is actually the tipping point of history - the pivot point - at which, had Jesus chosen otherwise, we would not be where we are today, and the world would have had no redeemer.

This is the point where you have to decide whether to jump from the airplane, or bottle out. You have to decide whether you are going to trust your parachute to open, or stay in the aircraft thinking, 'If only...' and 'what if...?'

There is a beautiful - but sad - country song, like so many country songs, by Martina McBride called 'Broken Wing', in which she sings about a woman abused by her husband.

In order to finally end the abuse and escape from it, she takes her own life. But the chorus has the words, '...and with a broken wing, she still sings, she keeps an eye on the sky; and with a broken wing, she carries her dreams - man, you ought to see her fly.'

It is a powerful and tragic song, but the message is timeless.

No, I am not saying it the same as what Jesus went through - but I am saying that it is about sacrifice and faith. I am not going into the theological rights and wrongs of suicide - let us accept that in this broken world - it happens; peoples' pain gets too much sometimes.

I had a good friend once - another minister and in the US Navy. He suffered from appalling depression, and one day he went out and bought a gun from the gun shop - this is the USA remember, so no-one asks him why or what for? Or checks any possibly relevant medical history - just hands over the weapon and ammunition. An hour later he has blown his brains out in a forest. Sometimes the pain just gets too much.

I like to think he's flying too now.

But for Jesus - he was caught between a rock and hard place; to try to go back would not get him anywhere - he has come too far. As Macbeth says in Shakespeare's play, 'I am in

blood steeped in so far, that should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er.'

Neither of these examples is entirely appropriate for the situation Jesus finds himself in, but I want to make the point that Jesus is literally at break point; to surrender to his all too frail humanity now would be to lose the whole purpose of his manifesting in human form at all. His divine self knows this all too well - yet his human self knows just what is around the corner - now only minutes away.

Have you ever asked yourself how we know what Jesus prayed in the garden? After all,

the disciples were all asleep - we are told not once, but three times. So who was it who heard what Jesus was praying, and witnessed the event so closely that they could write down that he was sweating drops like blood?

The only gospel that makes no mention of Jesus' agony of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is John, from which we read just now. This is possibly to spare Jesus the appearance of weakness in his record, as we are told more than once that John was the 'disciple that Jesus loved,' so perhaps he was seeking to avoid any ignominious potential slur on Jesus' character.

However the record came to be written, and for whatever reason John chose not to include it in his gospel, it matters little, as whatever Jesus did or didn't say in the garden, it was his last chance to avoid what was coming.

That is the drama of tonight - the pivotal point of history for the reality of the Christian Church, which has come to mean so much for so many over the last two thousand years.

Dwell quietly in your hearts as we re-enact this drama tonight; when you see the washing of the feet, when you come to take the bread and the wine, when you sense the desertion of Jesus in the stripping of the altar, and the

laying down of the cross in preparation for the brutality of tomorrow's execution.

Don't think of this in a cold, dispassionate way - you and I are taking our best friend to his death, though we have been too slow to understand that until Judas comes with the guards and priests from the Temple, striding across the grass of the olive grove.

But now it's too late to do anything about it.