

As we come to the last few sections of John's gospel we are coming to the climax of the story which, of course, is just the start of the next phase of the story. We come to Easter and we remember the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is such a familiar story that it's easy to skim over it. In all my years I had not registered that there were two disciples with Jesus. We don't know who was with Peter although the likelihood is that it was John. I suspect that it's because there is more of the story in other gospels so I would usually read one of them, but I have read John often and I just didn't remember that detail. So, although many of us will be familiar with this story I want you to join with me in trying to work out why John has written in these different scenes today.

He was in the garden where they had been so many times before. They were comfortable there and it felt like home. But when he called there was no answer. Something was wrong. Their friendship had soured and there was a bad taste in the air, made all the worse by the excuses and feeble stories that followed. Love had been trampled on and it would take millennia to grow again.

You see, the story of Adam in the garden, in Genesis 2 and 3, stands behind the garden of betrayal in this chapter as well as the garden of Easter in Ch 20. Remember that John has really been writing a new Genesis. Here, in this decisive section of the story, we see what it really means that the Word became flesh.

Here the roles are reversed. Sinful, violent men come into the garden in the darkness, looking for someone. They didn't know it but, like all humans, they were looking for God.

Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus has no need to hide. He knows what he needs to do. John doesn't focus on the agony Jesus felt in the garden but he has already told us in Chs 11, 12 and 13 that Jesus was deeply troubled. It is as if the new Adam steps forward to meet the old; the Word who is God comes to greet 'the world'; the Light of the World stands in front of those who have come in physical and spiritual darkness.

Jesus takes the initiative and asks them who they're looking for. When they tell him his answer is both simple and shocking. He says, "I am", meaning I'm the one. For John, with the God-Adam confrontation in the background, and all the 'I am' sayings recorded in his Gospel, there is no doubt what he wants us to hear.

It's quite simple. Here is THE 'I AM', the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and The Life. I suspect something of this explains why the arresting party fall to the ground. It mirrors what people in the bible do when they come face to face with God. Isn't it sad that Judas wasn't actually necessary after all. He may have been paid to identify Jesus but many of the people there would have known Jesus and Jesus wasn't actually trying to hide. It simply shows that their only way to understand Jesus and his Kingdom was on their own terms – they were thinking violent revolution, but Jesus has not come to lead a military revolution – even if Peter was still thinking like that! All of the gospels have the part where Peter strikes the guard but only Luke records that Jesus healed him. The story serves as a reminder that Jesus was not going to use force, earthly or heavenly, to fulfil the Father's plan.

There is real irony here: Jesus, the great High Priest is taken before the earthly High Priest, and John reminds us that he has already proclaimed that it would be best for one man to die for the people. John is setting up the next part of the story: the real High Priest will be sent to his death by the false one so that, through his death, God will rescue not just the Jews, but all who believe.

Then we change locations and there is an incredibly significant story at play. Smell can be a very powerful stimulator. One single scent can take you back to another time and place. You can recall the place, the people, what was said, and particularly what it felt like.

I think there is one feature to note in this amazingly sad story of Peter telling people he didn't belong to Jesus when his heart was crying out

that he really did. Charcoal fires have a particular smell to them. If there was one around when you experienced something traumatic you'd remember it the next time you smelt a fire. Not long after this another charcoal fire appears in the story and it calls up for Peter and Jesus the events of this sad night. I think it does so in order to heal the open wound that this night leaves in Peter.

Although we see Jesus being questioned the focus is still on Peter. Jesus is speaking truth while Peter is lying. Jesus is not trying to hide but Peter is. But at least he is there. As I said, we don't know who the other disciple was but he was definitely the stronger of the two.

Peter is cold and tired, drained of the adrenaline of the garden, wondering if the guards will remember that he injured one of them and put him on trial as well. When all of this comes together it produces fear, panic, lies and disloyalty. We need to remember that and make sure we take time to refresh ourselves. *

Sometimes if you listen to our officials in Middle Eastern countries you find them trying to answer questions without actually answering the questions. It's often because he or she has left an affluent home life in the West to represent the UK in an inhospitable and hostile land where people speak a different language not only with their lips but their hearts and lives. Things are very different and the main aim is to avoid any trouble. Pilate was exactly like that. He was a long way from home, a career politician or soldier, looking to move up the ladder and find a better posting by keeping out of trouble. It didn't happen. He was removed from office around AD 37 and never heard of again.

His style of justice involved pragmatism – he did whatever would work to keep the peace. He tried to send Jesus back to the Jewish authorities but they were having none of it. He knew that Jesus was not stirring up a revolution but Jesus is accused of having done something worthy of death and only the Romans could carry that out.

So, Jesus is going to die the death reserved for rebels. He said he would be lifted up and Jesus on the cross will reveal the amazing majesty of God's saving love. At this point the lines converge: what Jesus, Pilate and the chief priest intend to happen is rushing together, albeit for totally different reasons.

The ancient world knew more about kings than we do. They knew that Kings were absolute rulers with total authority. They became kings through birth or revolution. The way to the crown for those outside the royal family was violence. So Pilate thinks that Jesus' claim to be a king would only end one way – revolution among the Jews and trouble for him.

Many translations have Jesus saying vs 36 *³⁶ Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'*

The problem with using 'of' here is that it suggests that his 'kingdom' is totally other-worldly, a spiritual or heavenly reality that has nothing to do with the real world. The point is that Jesus' kingdom does not come *from* this world. John has told us repeatedly that the world is the source of evil and rebellion and Jesus is denying that his kingdom has none of these properties. His kingdom doesn't come *from* this world, but it is *for* this world – and that is a crucial distinction.

Jesus was speaking and bringing truth. You don't get truth from a test tube or mathematical formula. Philosophers, judges or politicians don't own it. It's a gift, a strange quality that, like Jesus' kingdom, comes from elsewhere but takes up residence in the world. Jesus comes to reveal truth – he is the truth.

When we pitch *the* truth against the world's truth, as Pilate did, we often find the world's version wins. That's why I chose this image today. So we find one man falsely accused of promoting revolution handed over to be executed while one who had taken part in an actual revolt was released.

The truth is that Jesus died on a cross for you and for me – and he did it because he loves us.