

In the house of Caiaphas: Mark 14.32-72

Worn stone steps mark the way up from the Kidron valley to the terraced gardens of the priestly families who lived on the hillside overlooking the south entrance to the Temple. Jesus must have come this way, maybe walked on these very steps, as he was hustled before the high priest after that night-time arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Today it's the site of a church, St Peter in Gallicantu, the church of the cock-crow, built over the site of a first-century house which could well have been the house of Caiaphas. Thanks to Rod Hill for today's TFTD.



I wonder if you have listened to the LBC programme this week in which David Lammy, the Shadow Justice Secretary was discussing the term BAME which he called lazy and impersonal, on his LBC show, when he offered a more appropriate description of his identities: “I’m of African descent, African-Caribbean descent, but I am English.”

A caller, named Jean, said it was not possible to be both African-Caribbean and English. She told him: “You will never be English, you are African-Caribbean.” It seems that Jean wanted to define Englishness by the colour of her skin and she went on to insist that it was “fine” for Lammy to say he was British, but that he was “not English”. She then went on to suggest that because she is white, she would never describe herself as Caribbean.

I wonder if, behind this, is an easy temptation to fall into ‘otherness’, by which I mean to define people as ‘other’ because they are different from you and to use that in a demeaning and/or diminishing kind of way. It then becomes easy to

blame the 'other' for all the ills of society.

I wonder if there is something of that going in the way that Mark tells us about the interactions at the house of the High Priest.

A couple of years ago Carole and I were privileged to visit Oberammergau with a group of potential tour leaders for the 2020 Passion Play (which was, of course, postponed - we will be going next year instead) to see the director of the Passion Play reveal the cast for the 2020 production. It was an interesting and moving event in itself, to be in the village and amongst the villagers as the names were read out, you could sense the tension and the atmosphere created by the service in the Parish Church and the procession from there to the Passion Play theatre. However, that wasn't the highlight for me.

We were accommodated for the weekend in one of the many guest houses around the village, Gasthaus Otto Huber; and it wasn't until we had been there a while that I discovered the significance of the proprietor, Otto Huber, in relation to the Passion Play. Otto was the deputy director of the 2000 Passion Play, the first one that I saw, and is the man responsible for the biggest rewriting of the script in the past 160 years.

His aim was to drag the play from its medieval roots and replant it in the light of modern thinking. To add drama, more relevance but, above all, to excise its anti-Semitic content.

Since 1965, when Vatican II decreed Jews should not bear collective guilt for the death of Christ, Jewish organisations, particularly in the US, had been lobbying for changes to the world's most famous Passion Play. They had won modifications along the way but nothing compared to Huber's text.

It was humbling to hear this mild-mannered old man, with a bit of a dry sense of humour, speaking of the changes that he had made in such a powerful text and explaining it in a quiet, friendly chat. It was powerful to recognise just how easy it is for me to 'blame the Jews for Jesus' death, or to blame 'the Roman Empire' or 'Pontius Pilate'. To blame the 'other', every 'other' and to not to see that I have some part in it. I am constantly surprised and irritated to discover how easy it is for me to fall into casual sexism, racism, ageism etc. How easy it is to 'other' people unintentionally.

So, for me, the symbolism of the service of Tenebrae, (which I first shared in as a young man in Holy Week 1984) has taken on a new significance this year, as it marks the symbols of *my failure* and allows ***me to own my failure*** to follow Christ. Maybe you will find the same as you walk through this Holy Weekend.

"We may not know, we cannot tell,

what pains he had to bear,

But we believed it was for us (me)

He hung and suffered there”

For all, for all , my Lord was crucified!

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