

Peter

Good Friday 2018

John 18: 1-27

What is remarkable is that Peter is still there. The other disciples had long since run away. Did he resent the fact that he, almost alone, was loyal to Jesus? Or was he relieved? Eleven Galilean men hanging round outside the High Priest's house would have been very conspicuous! Perhaps he was now only too aware of the promises he had made so easily

Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.

Matthew 26:35 35B

and failed to keep. Peter had deserted Jesus – but he was there now. He was waiting. Perhaps he was still hoping that Jesus would be released and normal life resumed.

Peter and another unnamed disciple gained access to the High Priest's courtyard by a bit of subterfuge. We do not know how, but the other disciple was known to the High Priest, so he chatted up the woman on the gate:

Can I come in? Is it OK if my mate comes with me?'

That was their undoing. As they passed through the gate the woman looked at Peter

You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?'

It is an interesting way of asking a question. It is a question which expects the answer is No'. She/s not sure. It is made easy for Peter and instinctively he gives the expected answer, 'I am not.' I am not a disciple of Jesus

His reaction is that of self preservation. That is all that matters. But where is the other disciple? Did he hear the exchange of words between Peter and the woman? Did he exchange glances with Peter? Peer looking guilty and the other disciple contemptuous?

Peter joins the crowd round the fire, all warming themselves. Perhaps he can be lost in a crowd. But the crowd are all ganging up on him:

You are not also one of his disciples, are you?'

Why do they do this? Why do they insist on drawing attention to Peter? Idle curiosity? Animosity towards a man with a foreign accent? The chance to ridicule and victimize? Nothing much has changed in human nature.

And then one of them brings hard evidence. He knows someone who knows something:

Did I not see you in the garden with him?'

Peter must now be frightened. He is the focus of attention of a hostile crowd. He feels abused.

After the third denial the cock crows and he realizes what he has done. All his best intentions have come to nothing. He has failed utterly. Even while Peter was protesting his loyalty, Jesus knew he would fail. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. And Peter must have felt that it was not a self worth knowing.

But Jesus not believe that. Jesus knew the worst of Peter and still loved him. Still trusted him. Just a few days later he would entrust Peter with the care of his own followers with a simple command, spoken three times:

Feed my Sheep.

John 21:17

N Clews

30th March 2018

Pilate

Good Friday 2018

John 18: 29-40

There is clearly some kind of stand off going on between Pate and the Jews. They have an agreement that Pilate will simply rubber stamp their legal decisions. But Pilate is not playing ball. Why does he not play ball? Is it because they refused to enter Pilate's HQ in order to avoid ritual defilement? We will never know!

So Pirate has to go out to them. And he asks the proper questions.

What accusation do you bring against this man?'

The Jews do not give an answer. In effect they remind him of their understanding.

If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.

Pilate gives a proper reply

Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.

and the Jews again remind him of their understanding,

We are not permitted to put anyone to death.

So Pilate takes Jesus inside. No one seems to care whether Jesus incurs ritual defilement – not even Jesus! I guess John the Gospel writer would say that since Jesus is the ritual sacrifice the question is immaterial!

Pilate's question to Jesus reveals that he has indeed been primed :

Are you the King of the Jews?

– no one has mentioned this allegation publicly. But it is a strange question. Pilate, as Governor, should know exactly who the king is – and the Romans will have ratified the decision. I think he was fascinated by Jesus. Jesus' reply suggests that he knows very well that Pilate has been primed:

Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?

Pilate's reply is sharp as if to remind Jesus who is in charge:

I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?

Jesus' response about the nature of his kingdom seems to go over Pilate's head as he asks

So you are a king?

Pilate lives in a world of practical politics. His famous question, 'What is Truth' is an acknowledgement of this with a hint that Pilate knows that there are philosophical and theological realities that the world of politics simply cannot take into account. It is a rather regretful question. Perhaps Pilate is not by nature a cynical man. But being Governor of a remote province does not allow a man to be generous or open minded. And Pilate is above all a man who is part of a much larger machine. And a man who pays attention to his own career and his own advancement.

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