

PASSIONTIDE 2021- READING JOHN 12. 20-33

In the Church's year, there are many seasons. We are still in the season of Lent which helps to prepare us for the new life, joy and hope we can find in Easter and beyond.

But in the Church's year, there are also seasons within seasons. One such season is Passiontide which begins today and you could say that it ends on Good Friday. In this Season, we think of the singlemindedness of Christ as he takes on his enemies in Jerusalem for the last time.

As a way of reflecting on Jesus' Passion, perhaps this example takes us into it. Today, we often say that a person has a passion for what they do and it is an all consuming passion such as an athlete training for the Olympic Games.

In the same way, you could say that Jesus had an all consuming passion to bring in the Kingdom of God into what we call "time". He also knew that what he was doing would lead to a conflict between himself and religious authorities of the day in Jerusalem. He also knew that the timing of this conflict would not be at the beginning of his ministry but at the end of it.

We see Jesus' thinking about the timing of his final conflict with the religious authorities of the day early on in John's Gospel at his first miracle at Cana in Galilee where he turns water into wine.

At first, he seems very reluctant to do anything to help because he says, "...my time has not yet come". For me, his use of the word "time" means that at the outset of his ministry, he is not looking to fundamentally confront all those who he knows will be his enemies. He knows that this "time" will come much later.

If you read John's Gospel you will see that it is dominated by what and was and was not the right "time" for Jesus to finally confront his enemies.

But the timing of Jesus' final and intense conflict with the religious authorities of the day is not a private matter. It is conducted by Jesus in the final days of his earthly ministry in a public way because he knows that this will help to bring in the "Kingdom" he spoke of in his earthly ministry. You could say that in the last few days of his life, Jesus has an all consuming passion to complete the work he was asked to do by the person he called "the Father".

You will find in John's Gospel Jesus using the words "the Father" many times.

Today the future of the Kingdom Jesus spoke of and lived out is in the hands of all who choose to follow Christ today. And the intensity of Jesus' passion in giving birth to and promoting the Kingdom is also to be deeply within all who choose to follow Christ today.

In this context, here are some words of John Wesley for us to reflect on:

Do all the good you can, By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can, At times you can. To all the peoples you can. As long as you ever can.

And these words of John Bell in his hymn "Will you come and follow me" are also to the point.

Will you come and follow me if I but call you your name.? Will you go where you don't know and never be same? Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in you, and you in me?

But history does show us whilst humanity does have the capacity to pursue all consuming passions, sometimes their outcomes can turn out to be destructive ones.

This reminds me of scientist who master minded the atom bomb. After he had done this, it is said that he realised that he had become the destroyer of worlds. Perhaps this should make us reflect on the words “Be careful what you wish for”.

Today, we are slowly emerging out of another Lockdown. As this happens, how can we be passionate about our faith journey and find new ways of telling it?

As we do this, here is a thought for you:

Many today are rightly concerned about the future of our planet and how we can better look after it.

But our faith journey does speak into this situation by asking all of God’s humanity to be better stewards of this very small part of God’s Creation. This fact can help us to introduce our faith journey to those who have no contact with it and this Sunday in the Church’s year tells us to be passionate as we do this.

Are we up for the challenge of passionately finding new ways of telling out our faith journey?

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