

Isolation – John 18

I do not feel that equipped to speak about isolation, I share a home with my husband and have been keeping in contact with family and friends over the phone and online. Also, I have been going out into the community through my work. It has been hard not seeing family and friends in person though, as it has for us all.

Many have felt isolated. Separated from family and friends, one lady said that she missed talking to people at the bus stop and not meeting people while she was out and about, something that we are all being told we must not do.

In a study I looked at 70% of young people said that they have felt alone some or all of the time during the pandemic. Loneliness has affected all generations.

I have been asked to look at John Chapter 18 and the passion in relation to isolation. The chapter starts 'After Jesus had spoken these words', the words 'I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I am them'.

So, following these words Jesus went to a garden, where Judas brought those to arrest him. Jesus, 'knowing all that was to happen to him', asks them who they are looking for. They say 'Jesus of Nazareth' and when He responds, 'I am he', they step back and fall to the ground'.

Jesus tells them to let the disciples go, but Peter defends Him and cuts an ear from one of the arresters. Jesus tells Peter to put away His sword. Jesus is then arrested and taken away to be questioned by Annas and struck for His answers. He then taken to Caiaphas the High Priest, then passed to Pilate.

After interviewing Him, Pilate can find no case to answer and offers to release Jesus as was the custom at Passover. However, 'They shouted' release Barabbas, a bandit. And from here we go into Chapter 19 where Jesus will be flogged, forced to wear a crown of thorns and carry his own cross and be crucified.

So where is isolation? There is isolation in Jesus being separated from His followers, He is alone. The disciples feel isolated as Jesus has been taken from them, there is an isolation from each other. Peter will deny Jesus three times, so not only isolated physically but he also isolates himself from Jesus, breaks the connection and has to bear that knowledge when the cock crows.

The three courts even though working to the same goal, are also working in isolation. Each man is there to make a decision, which none of them make, it is just passed on and on and on; they are isolated.

So how does that relate to isolation in the pandemic. We could say that Jesus experiences isolation; God goes through it. We cannot say God does not understand because He does and we are to be encouraged as He is with us in our isolation, through experience.

Jesus is not going to a lonely place where we cannot follow. He is forging a path for us to follow. I have been reading Sam Wells 'Hanging by a Thread' and he says the closer we stay to Jesus the nearer we come to life. This can be difficult to understand but if we keep our eyes lifted to the cross, when we do feel isolated there is someone there to look to and we can have hope.

People have said when they are going through really difficult times that is when they have felt closest to God; companionship amid adversity.

God wants a relationship with us right from the very start at the Creation story, God creating Adam and He is compelled to be among us and alongside us through Jesus.

And that being with us is for eternity, forever. When does eternity start, well it is with us now? Having that belief and faith can give us hope.

In our isolation, which can happen to us all and especially at this time of pandemic, we know God is relational, that Jesus is part of a Trinity, although isolated on the cross. There is that relationship there with the Holy Spirit and the Father within God. He has that relationship there in which He can have faith. And so, can we.

There are other things we can do, we can connect. If you feel you need to talk to someone there is probably someone who feels just like that. We can be relational with others and connect. Being part of the community at Crayford and talking with others, we are in a relationship which brings much joy.

We are also not powerless, we are under God's power which gives us power, maybe ask to be filled by the Holy Spirit, to move us, empower and help us.

We are cared for, God loves us, even when we get it wrong. During Lent we can look at ourselves and God sees all of that, but is still with us ready to forgive.

We can find out community. The community at St Paulinus is made up of many communities and we can still be in that community, even though we cannot meet together in person. There is still the telephone, online platforms and letters!

We can find things to be grateful for, to see not that there is nothing to be done but there is still something that is there. We had a beautiful day recently and many people said to me, what a lovely day, so good to be out in the sun. And one person said, 'better make the most of it, it is going to be awful tomorrow'. We can choose to look ahead or behind, which can bring us to feel isolated, although it is a reality for many. Or we can feel the sun on our face at that time in the present and be present. We can live in the presence and in the hope that things are going to be better (again looking forward of course), and look at this day and what we have, things we have been given and maybe share with others.

So, if we know someone who is isolated, we can make that call. If we are feeling isolated maybe we can make that call. And I will bring us back to where I began. Jesus went through isolation.

'I will make your name known so the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them'.

So, God is in relation with us in the isolation and may we know his presence with us always. Amen