



Passion in Perspective

For our lent course this year we will be following the passion of Christ as told in the Gospel of John while seeking to understand it within the context of the Covid pandemic. We will look at six aspects of Christ's passion; darkness, touch, anxiety, isolation, pain, and re-birth, and look how these aspects manifest themselves within the current Covid situation

Week Four: Isolation

Read John Chapter 18, especially paying attention to the following

Jesus before Pilate

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' ³⁰ They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' ³¹ Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' ³² (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴ Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' ³⁵ Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' ³⁶ Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' ³⁷ Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to

*the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'*³⁸ Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

Read the whole chapter through. Then read the chapter again. Think about the following in relation to isolation

- Jesus stands alone before Pilate, there is no one to support him!
- Throughout his ministry, Jesus has had the constant companionship of his disciples. Here, he finds himself a solitary figure
- When Peter denies Jesus towards the end of chapter 18 he is doing more than just saying he does not know him. Peter is denying friendship, companionship and trust. He is prepared to send Jesus to his fate rather than put himself in danger. His denial is a mixture of panic, fear, and confusion. But this makes Peter an "isolated figure" in himself!

Consider the following, the still small voice

How is isolation different to solitude?

There are times when we choose to be by ourselves. Jesus entered the wilderness by choice, and became a solitary figure discerning his vocation. Jonah found himself alone in the belly of the whale, Job was a poor neglected figure until his friends arrived.

In his well-known encounter with God, Elijah hears him in the silence. But he is a lonely figure subjected to the elements before God reveals himself to him! And even when he does it is in the sheer silence. Elijah, standing alone, hears God through the stillness, the still small voice Read the following...

Elijah Meets God at Horeb

¹¹He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he

wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

- Silence can be a comfort, but it can be oppressive too! It can feel like our world is slowly creeping in on us. Without human contact, our physical and mental health can be at risk
- Isolation is not a retreat! It's not a chosen situation. We can often find ourselves isolated against our wishes, for instance when good friends turn against us!
- How easy is it to encounter God in periods of isolation? We may feel, like Job, that God has abandoned us! How much of who we are, our personalities help shape our experiences of being alone? Extroverts may lament the loss of human contact; introverts may be more comfortable with it. But no one wants to be put in a situation where they feel isolated against their wishes. No one wants to feel "pushed out" or "made to feel not welcome"

Putting it into context

Within lockdown the Church was initially closed. The physical act of "keeping people out" and of locking the Church's doors was very difficult to comprehend. It felt like our community had been fractured!

Covid has seen many instances of isolation, not just in the Church, but within wider society. People have been cut off from loved ones in hospital, friends at School, home visits have not been possible, or visits to care homes! In a recent study into mental health, isolation was a major contributor to the mental wellbeing of individuals!

As a Church we need to recognise those who live within isolation on a daily basis, and extend our offer of inclusion and welcome to them

Let us Pray!

Heavenly Father, help us to remember we are a community of people sharing your gifts of love, support, and friendship. Help us to help others who may feel afraid and lost at this time **Amen**

Night Prayer

You may wish to light a candle and have some reflective music playing in the background.

Opening Sentences

The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. **Amen.**

Our help is in the name of the Lord
who made heaven and earth.

Pause and reflect on the day that is past.

Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.

Bible Reading

You may wish to say here the psalm given below,

- 1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides under the shadow of the Almighty,
- 2 Shall say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my
stronghold, my God, in whom I put my trust.'
- 3 For he shall deliver you from the snare of the
fowler and from the deadly pestilence.
- 4 He shall cover you with his wings

and you shall be safe under his feathers;
his faithfulness shall be your shield and buckler.
5 You shall not be afraid of any terror by night,
nor of the arrow that flies by day;
6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor of the sickness that destroys at noonday.
7 Though a thousand fall at your side
and ten thousand at your right hand,
yet it shall not come near you.
8 Your eyes have only to behold
to see the reward of the wicked.
9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge
and the Most High your stronghold,
10 There shall no evil happen to you,
neither shall any plague come near your tent.
11 For he shall give his angels charge over you,
to keep you in all your ways.
12 They shall bear you in their hands,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
13 You shall tread upon the lion and adder;
the young lion and the serpent
you shall trample underfoot.
14 Because they have set their love upon me,
therefore will I deliver them;
I will lift them up, because they know my name.
15 They will call upon me and I will answer them;
I am with them in trouble,
I will deliver them and bring them to honour.
16 With long life will I satisfy them
and show them my salvation.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

You may wish to use the following short reading

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. *Matthew 11.28-end*

Prayers

Merciful God, we entrust to your unfailing and tender care this night those who are ill or in pain, knowing that whenever danger threatens your everlasting arms are there to hold us safe. Comfort and heal them, and restore them to health and strength; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may rest upon your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, we pray, and drive far from it the snares of the enemy; may your holy angels dwell with us in peace, and may your blessing be always upon us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.

The Conclusion

In peace we will lie down and sleep;
for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.
The Lord bless us and watch over us;
The Lord make his face to shine upon us
and be gracious to us;
The Lord look kindly upon us and give us his peace, ***Amen***