

This morning's Gospel is not easy to penetrate- Who do people say I am? - question of Jesus to his disciples; question to us; who do people say I am ?

Why did Jesus ask his disciples what people were saying about him? Why did he want to know? Why should it have mattered? One way of answering these questions is that Jesus was wondering himself who he was, and that he was looking to his disciples for support.

Set the passage in context- from the beginning of the Gospel Jesus was wondering who he was? This is especially exposed in the temptations in the wilderness; Who do people say I am?

The immediate context of this passage is that it is an important turning point of the Gospel- at this point in his public career Jesus is more than able to read the writing on the wall. He knows that he is going to be in trouble- and this must have troubled him: it could **not** be what he had expected from the beginning. Most of us expect God to bless our work; we expect that when we put our trust in God, God will in turn protect us and support us in our work. There is no reason to think that Jesus had different expectations.

He had not been preaching for nothing, and yet opposition was growing. Perhaps Jesus was wondering if he had made a mistake, made a wrong turn, overlooked some indication of God's will. St. Mark's Gospel version of this event emphasises this questioning and doubt- because in Mark's version Peter tried to talk Jesus out of going to Jerusalem; to which Jesus makes a fairly robust response to Peter's suggestion -'get behind me Satan' - in St. Mark's Gospel it would seem that Peter had become the tempter- it was as though Jesus had said to Peter 'If you only knew Peter just how much I have desired NOT to go to Jerusalem; if you only knew how sorely tempted I have been to run. If you only knew how foggy everything is right now. Peter I need your support: instead, you tempted me; kicked me when I was down.

All this questioning arises from Jesus at prayer- the question of Jesus' identity arises from prayer. Prayer is a radical activity.

What can we take from this for us today and our understanding of the Gospel?- Jesus found himself in the same situation anyone who follows him finds him or herself in- Jesus is in the same place as we are- opposition is inevitable. Convincing people that they are unconditionally loved by God, that they are to love their enemies concretely in their lives - this sort of teaching upsets everything. It is not the way of the world- in Jesus' time or today. Our world feeds off fear. We control people by fear - you just have to look at the reaction to refugees fleeing to our country; they are a threat- we sell things to people by engaging their fear.

But we who believe in God's radical trustworthiness cannot act like everyone else. Refugees, asylum seekers, the poor (whether worthy or unworthy) are the objects of God's love and are embraced by God. We must try to change things; we might question the structures, and popular culture and politics. We may be committed to something as old fashioned as THE GOOD, rather than the POLICY. We will act without allegiance to the nation state, to British patriotism, English culture we will argue in favour of some higher value.

As such as Christians we will be seen as a threat; and we are.

There is a movement called Liberation Theology which flourished in Latin America; it was a Theology which led to Christian Activists embracing a liberation model of the Gospel to question the political structures and oppression and engaging in radical action in the countries. It was a theology that led to the martyrdom of many Christians including Archbishop Romero.

There's an infamous US document which was leaked to the to the public-this document identified liberation theology as a geopolitical threat and the document displayed a conscious strategy of bank rolling and supporting conservative fundamentalist groups and conservative church leaders throughout Latin America.

Of course, their foe wasn't liberation theology as such but the radical gospel- a gospel which foments hope, encourages action, which reveals possibilities for change. The hundreds of thousands of Latin American martyrs were (and continue to be) killed for the same reasons that Jesus himself was killed: he was a real threat. His simple message about God's love had to be suppressed.

Is the church of England a threat- are we a threat by living the gospel of God's love?

Creative action will, living out the Gospel of love of enemies cause opposition and challenge and lead to Calvary. Creativity and the resurrection were preceded by calvary.

The natural world bears out that, beauty creativity, hope, new life emerges from struggle and challenge.

A family brought in two cocoons; a cocoon is a protective case of silk spun by the larvae of moths and butterflies as a cover for the pupa.

The cocoons were about to hatch. The family watched as the first one began to open and the butterfly inside squeezed very slowly and painfully through a tiny hole that it chewed in one end of the cocoon. After lying exhausted for about ten minutes following its agonizing emergence, the butterfly finally flew out the open window on its beautiful new wings.

The family decided to help the second butterfly so that it would not have to go through such an excruciating ordeal. So, as it began to emerge, they carefully sliced open the cocoon with a razor blade, doing the equivalent of a Caesarean section. The second butterfly never did sprout wings, and in about ten minutes, instead of flying away, it quietly died.

The family asked a biologist friend to explain what had happened. The scientist said that the

difficult struggle to emerge from the small hole actually pushes liquids from deep inside the butterfly's body cavity into tiny capillaries in the wings where they hardened to complete the healthy and beautiful adult butterfly. The lesson? WITHOUT THE STRUGGLE, THERE ARE NO WINGS.