

Reflection for Wednesday 14th April 2021 Acts 5.17-26, St John 3. 16-21 (Psalm 34. 1-8)

As I hear the chatter and occasional shouts of children and parents along the footpath at the front of our house by the river in Stapenhill, I begin to realise that our society is beginning to return to some form of normality. Children always seem to refresh the spirits. Maybe it is because they so often inhabit a world where make-believe and reality can quickly change places; they always seem to be creating and inventing the world around them. The voices of these children as they pass along ring out with other concerns than those of the daily news, the exhilaration of riding bikes, walking on the 'mends' in the tarmac path, squabbling about ice lollies, grazing a knee, choosing which path mum or dad should take to the same destination, running on ahead of the grown-ups in a bid for freedom.

The last big pandemic, the so-called Spanish flu, lasted from about February 1918 to April 1920. It infected about a third of the world's population at the time and killed somewhere between 20 and 50 million souls, maybe more. If that is any guide at all it suggests the world is only about half way through the present crisis, but with modern rapid transport and trade this story may have many more twists. For all that, there is a gradual realisation that, after the dark night of recent months, the dawn may be not too far over the horizon. That must be our prayer.

When the chief priest Annas and the ruling Sadducees put the Apostles in gaol they did so because people from the surrounding Judean towns were coming into Jerusalem drawn by the healing miracles and exorcisms performed in Jesus' name. Saint Luke says that this made the authorities jealous, so they used their power to arrest the eleven. This was the second arrest for Peter and John who had earlier spent a night in custody when they healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 4.1-4). This time things would be different. It was during the night that God showed his hand. His messenger told the Apostles, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." To Annas and his class of leaders the answer to the darkness which surrounded them was to hold on to control. They couldn't lift up their eyes to see the coming dawn and they had no mental tools to understand the resurrection of Jesus. As our Gospel reading puts it, "This is the judgement, that light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil." (John 3.19).

What are we to take from this passage? Well, certainly we learn that the temporal powers couldn't then – or now – stop the Good News of Jesus from being shared. But we also learn that night time seems to be a good time for the Lord to act. This is just what we find when Peter is put in gaol for the third time (Acts 12.3-17) and when Paul and Silas are imprisoned in Philippi and are miraculously released (Acts 16.25-34). It is also at night that Paul dreams of a man of Macedonia calling him to "come over and help us", and this follows a time when missionary work was blocked elsewhere (Acts 16.9). If it seems like the night is long and the dawn is delayed in our present world crisis let us be encouraged that times which to us seem dark and impenetrable have proved to be God's opportunities, even when grief and loss is all around us.

The book of Psalms gives us these lines: 'If I say, "let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night," Even the darkness is not dark to thee, the night is as bright as the day, for the darkness and the light to thee are both alike.' (Psalm 139. 11-12) .

The sound of the children's voices along the path, or heard in the playground across the way, may be unknowingly prophetic of a world which God is making new around his loving purpose. The dark path we tread needn't be one of despair if we learn to look up and see the flags of dawn on the horizon.

Love and prayer to all, Richard