

3rd April 2026 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-end of 53

Hebrews 10:16-25 or 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1-end of 19

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus is a truly free person, and his freedom makes him enemies. Some of these enemies are people who knew him well, or ought to have known him better: perhaps they disagreed with certain choices he had made; perhaps they were disappointed that he wasn't who they'd hoped he would be. There were people who listened to Jesus and understood his message, and who violently disagreed with him. But many of Jesus' enemies are people who didn't know him: the crowds who get swept along by slogans; centurions who are following orders, more or less willingly; even Pilate, who chooses to kill him as the least bad option to secure Roman interests – the classic bureaucrat.

Out of the enemies mentioned in Scripture, one stands out for me. I talked about him here a few weeks ago: Caiaphas, the High Priest.

I think Caiaphas is the most perceptive and interesting of Jesus' enemies. John the Evangelist says that Caiaphas is a prophet; he prophesies – correctly, as it turns out – that “Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but to gather together the dispersed children of God” [11:51-52]. That prophesy is one of the best summaries of the Christian hope we find in Scripture – when taken out of context, admittedly.

Caiaphas is a prophet, and a true prophet; but he is not free. He has some power, some influence; and he is strongly connected to his own culture, his own group of supporters. But he is also imprisoned by fear. John reports the chief priests telling Caiaphas that “if we let [Jesus] go on like this” – raising people like Lazarus from the dead – “the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” [11:48]; and Caiaphas seems to take that to heart. He does not want his nation to be destroyed, and to prevent that happening he is willing to sacrifice his neighbour; he is imprisoned.

One of the painful ironies of Good Friday is how close Caiaphas comes to freedom. His prophesy is not so different from many things Jesus says about himself, the ways Jesus explains what he knows is going to happen to him. Earlier in Lent, we overheard Jesus telling Nicodemus that

...just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. [3:14-15]

And just after Caiaphas makes his prophesy, Jesus himself goes on to tell the crowds that

...I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. [John 12:32]

The Romans used the Cross to divide people. The threat of crucifixion keeps slaves in fear of authority, and discourages them from joining together in common cause. Caiaphas is willing to use the Cross in this way too: to show that there are good Judeans and bad Judeans.

But, as I've said, Jesus is not a slave, he is free. And he says that his Cross will do the opposite of what the Romans intend. It will draw all people together in solidarity. The "dispersed children of God": dispersed by our fear of one another and our fear of a God who we cannot imagine as anything other than an angry tyrant. This God draws near to us in our suffering Saviour; and he draws us to himself, to make us free.

Thanks be to God.