

John 18:12-27

This week we've skipped a few chapters of the Gospel of John again – we've skipped the whole of Jesus' farewell discourse. Instead over the next few weeks we'll look at the major moments in the Passion story which usually get forgotten about as they all happen in the short week between Palm Sunday and Easter. This year we get a chance to look closely at the events that immediately preceded Jesus' death.

Let's begin with this puzzling paragraph: 'Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant-girl on duty there and brought Peter in.'

First of all who is the other disciple and why is he known to the high priest? Also, if he is, why isn't he afraid to be harassed as Jesus' disciple the way Peter is? Has he been more successful in hiding his allegiance to Jesus all along or simply better connected and therefore protected from the backlash? We will never know this and the identity of the disciple will remain a mystery.

As to Peter himself, we need to note his courage. We don't see any of the other disciples at such a crucial time for Jesus. Where are they? Peter, even though he knew he might be facing danger by being associated with Jesus, pluck up the courage and followed his master to the courtyard where the trial was taking place.

He's visibly torn and afraid though which is very unusual for him. On one hand he's there, delivering on his earlier promise to Jesus that he will not leave him even though everybody else might. On the other hand when asked about being a disciple of Jesus, he says: 'I'm not.' He's torn between his loyalty and his fear. And even if he had an invisibility cloak, it would not help him either. His loyalty would remain unquestioned by anybody around him – but Jesus would have known anyway. The conflict was in Peter, whether expressed in words or not.

Considering that the guards are under orders and can do but what they were told to do and Annas and Caiaphas are under pressure from the Roman authorities on the one hand and Jewish religious authorities on the other, Jesus is paradoxically the only one who is truly free in this scenario. He's the only one, even though arrested, slapped and bound up, who is following his way regardless of circumstances. He's not torn between conflicting loyalties, he's not under pressure from anyone – he's the only one who is truly free.

At the end of today's reading the cock crows. We're reminded of a conversation from chapter 13 which reads: 'Simon Peter asked him, 'Lord, where are you going?'

Jesus replied, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.'

Peter asked, 'Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.'

Then Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times!'

Cock crowing reminded Peter of that conversation and his readiness to lay down his life for Jesus. He now knows that, when tested, he proved Jesus right – he did disown him three times before the cock crowed.

We know too that this is not the end of this particular story. We know that Jesus in chapter 21 will ask Peter three times: ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ After Peter’s affirmation, every time Jesus will tell him: ‘Feed my lambs.’ And feed he will and lay down his life for Jesus he will too. Today’s story is but a step on Peter’s longer journey of faith as we witness him being shaped into Peter the Rock on which Jesus will build his Church. It’s never too late for anyone and making mistakes is part and parcel of growing in Christ.

When he comes round again though, he is to feed Jesus’ lambs. We are too. That’s how we show our love for Jesus – by feeding his lambs. We can do this in various ways but one of them is buying Fairtrade.

In Fairtrade Fortnight Church Resources we read: ‘We live in very close relationship to millions of farmers and workers who live in developing countries all around the world – farmers who are often very poor – they grow the food on which we depend, and they depend on the income from trading with us. But many live in poverty, struggle to provide for their families, or experience serious human rights abuses. They are our neighbours, our sisters and our brothers, equally loved by God. How can we all be better neighbours?’¹

We might be afraid of those who are different to us or of being taken advantage of. And yet when we think of farmers around the world growing produce that will end up on our tables – do we want them to live in fear of not being able to feed their families? Do we want to take advantage of them just because we don’t know them? They depend on the income from trading with us. We want to be paid fairly for our work – why wouldn’t we want to give the same to others whom we don’t know?

God is calling us to build a fairer and more just world. Fairtrade ensures the farmers who work hard for us get paid enough to be able to feed their families, send them to school and build homes which are sturdy and safe. In the same resources we read again: ‘When the Fairtrade Foundation was established more than 20 years ago, its mission was seen by many as foolish and unwise. Surely a small group of charities could not make a difference to big business? Surely no-one would be prepared to pay extra for their coffee or chocolate if there was a cheaper alternative? And yet, millions of people up and down the country chose to vote with their wallets, and took the practical step of choosing Fairtrade. Today Fairtrade sales are calculated in billions of pounds, and our biggest companies have been challenged to behave differently. What looked like an insignificant, symbolic stand, is changing a whole industry for good.’²

It certainly is. Fairtrade mark, visible at the front cover of our orders of service today, can be found on more and more products. Locally everything we buy from the church’s Traidcraft stall is fairly traded but also all of the supermarkets have fairly traded goods – Coop leads the way with the greatest range of Fairtrade items but Tesco and even Lidl have increasingly

¹ <http://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Fairtrade-Fortnight-2018-church-worship-resources.pdf>.

² Ibid.

more Fairtrade goods: from sugar and coffee, through bananas to cotton buds. Every time I discover yet another one I feel we're winning the battle for a fairer world one product at a time. To God's glory. Amen.