

Reflection for Good Friday 2018

Matthew 26.69-end Denying friendship

69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' 70 But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.' 71 When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.'* 72 Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.' 74 Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man!' At that moment the cock crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

How many of us have been here? Challenged by friendship – our loyalty – loyalty to what? - put to the test. by forces outside us- religious authority – the C of E has been in the news enough about that recently – at the mercy of merciless states who flaunt their apparent impunity.

And Peter is betrayed by something occasionally worn with pride- a regional accent – I'm told I don't really have much trace of my South Yorkshire identity left (a student years ago said they thought I was 'educated Home Counties' – about as insulting as you could get to an ethnic Yorkshireman), and you'd have to enquire as to how much of his scouse origins David shows, after years in the Midlands, but Peter's Galilean Aramaic gives him away – was he trying to 'talk posh' in order to avoid detection, but unable to disguise his accent? Perhaps we'll never know , and can only speculate, but his situation is very real, has happened to many people many times .

It's a hard situation, faced by many people down the ages, when our loyalty to a friend is tested by a threat to our own security because of that friendship, when people try to imply, to persuade us, that there are higher loyalties to which, they suggest, we owe allegiance. And perhaps they intensify that pressure by threats to the innocent, to those we hold dear. The story of the depths to which people we describe as 'human beings', to whom we owe the human dignity they do not seem to deserve, will sink in the cause of something evil probably hasn't yet been fully plumbed.

And what of the one denied? We deny the existence of many people who need our love, support, care- how often have we, have I, walked past someone begging outside a store – but how, in the mass of competing demands, do we tell the worthy from the unworthy? That's a question which faces all who give support – certainly it faces food banks- ask those who have to administer food vouchers and distinguish worthy and unworthy! How would you do it? Which group would you fall into? One way forward is to give to organisations which are there for some time, which have people on the ground who should know what the real needs are. Such organisations have had a bad time recently, but perhaps the best we can do is place some trust in them to do some good. Life is not an easy, simple place to be, and all we can do is our best, and hope it is good enough, that it tries to do God's work of bringing forward the kingdom of Justice and Peace.

And what of the reaction of the denied to the deniers? Many of us would try to 'take some of them with us' to implicate them in some way, but there's no sign of this with Jesus- well if there were , the story of the Church might have been a lot shorter