

Reflection for Passion Sunday

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (John 12:20-33)

One thing I've really missed over the past year has been congregational hymn singing. I find hymns can set the scene for Sunday worship and help me to make a personal connection with the readings, especially when a hymn has been inspired by a particular passage of scripture. Good hymns are memorable so even without being able to gather to sing on a Sunday they will pop into the mind given a trigger. This week has been a case in point. Once I'd read the passage for this Sunday I found the twentieth century hymn 'Now the green blade riseth' just going round in my head. In case it doesn't ring any bells for you, you'll find the words at the end. Incidentally, the writer of that hymn, John Macleod Campbell Crum was born just down the road in Mere Old Hall, Tabley. He later became a Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, but that's by the way.

The hymn is usually sung at Easter, not at this point when we're still contemplating the road Jesus took to the cross. Its first line though, clearly draws its inspiration from the words spoken by Jesus in today's passage from John's gospel when he talks of the grain of wheat which is buried but re-emerges to produce fruit. I can't help wondering what the Greeks who were being introduced to him would have made of that. We know that Jesus was fond of using farming illustrations in his parables but the chances are that Greeks visiting Jerusalem during the festival would have been more urban in their background.

They had approached Philip to find out more about what was happening. No doubt they were wondering why this man was drawing a crowd. Instead of greeting them Jesus seems to have launched into a complex metaphor about his future. Added to which God's voice emerged from the heavens. I don't think the Greeks would have ended up any the wiser. I wonder if Jesus understood that because he then says 'when I am lifted from the earth, I will draw all people to myself'. He knew that it was through the resurrection that people from all over the world would come to know him.

It's that personal encounter with the risen Jesus which brings people to worship. We've worried about the closure of our churches in the last year. We've been concerned that we're seeing the end of worship as we know it. Well, we might be, but it will never be the end of our faith. When we think that Canon Crum would never have imagined a service delivered over YouTube video, and the disciples probably never dreamt that they were the forerunners of a worldwide movement, we realise that Jesus draws us to himself regardless of how or when we gather. He invites us to meet him in love and in that love worship continues in all its varied forms. So let us look forward in hope as we greet the resurrected Christ on Easter Day when 'Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green'. Amen

Ann Barlow

Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

In the grave they laid him, Love whom men had slain,
thinking that never he would wake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
thy touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again,
like wheat that springeth green.

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872-1958)
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