



QUIET DAY: REFLECTION BY SR ALISON

John 10:31-end

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.' Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"? If those to whom the word of God came were called "gods"—and the scripture cannot be annulled— can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son"? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, 'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.' And many believed in him there.

John 10 31-41 gives us glimpses of two groups of people. Where would you be in this story?

We would like to think we would not be the ones picking up the stones. We would like to think we would be with Jesus, standing foursquare behind him, if not beside him. But, if we are honest, the tendency to throw stones is in all of us. We would like to think we would be among those flocking to him at the Jordan. If we had been there, would we have believed in him?

The first group are behaving badly in the face of a reality they cannot fully grasp. Because things are unclear to them, they feel as if everything that they hold dear might be about to be threatened. None of us knows how the present crisis over Covid-19 will pan out. We are all nervous, anxious and on edge. We cannot see the way ahead clearly. This can make us snap at people – even the most mild, kind, generous people – for no good reason (even though it might seem to make perfect sense in the heat of the moment). We might not literally throw stones, but we know we could if provoked enough. We have all watched people barge others out of the way to get to the loo rolls in the supermarkets. Self-interest surges to the surface when people are frightened and uncertain. Being honest about that is a long way toward becoming the person we wish we were – with God's help.

The Jews in the story cannot quite put their finger on who Jesus is. If he is who some, at the time, were beginning to suspect – the Messiah – then that demands a response. It demands a wholehearted response, a totality-of-my-life response, and if anyone is going to make that kind of level of commitment...well...we would all want to be sure it was the right thing to do. So, "What if this Jesus is a hoaxer?" they ask themselves. If these events were happening now, we might say, "What if this is fake news?". Once we let in a doubt, a suspicion, an uncertainty, then it tends to run away with us, undermining the things we would once have taken on trust and believed without question. A marriage seems rock solid and a paragon of domestic bliss, until one partner finds an unexpected text on the other's phone. Even if there is a perfectly innocent and accurate explanation, the doubts creep

Commented [A1]:

in...Even if Christ has been our faithful Lord for decades, there are days when, in spite of everything we know, we doubt. Even nuns and monks doubt. We can be right up there with the Jews of John chapter 10.

Jesus takes their fear and doubt. He does not run away from the stones they are about to hurl at him. He stands firm in the face of their panic and pain. He sees it for what it is and tries to help them see things afresh. Jesus asks them to take another look at scripture. All people are children of God. Whoever they are, however extreme their views, however annoying, or irresponsible, or just plain wrong they appear to us. So Jesus can say he is Son of God with no blasphemy. But, he tries to get the Jews to see that who you are (a child of God) and what you do should be one and the same thing. When Jesus asks them to look at his deeds and see if they are the works of God, he is, in effect, turning a mirror on them, with the stones in their hands and asking them implicitly if their actions are the works of God. Now it is Jesus' turn to sow a seed of doubt, only doubt for the good. Some of them must have dropped their stones at this point. Others would be all the more infuriated and determined to hold on to them or fling them. Are we ready to let Jesus face down our pain and panic? Can we hear what he has to say to us in our times of turmoil? Will we let him unfold truths for us and let his revelations change us?

Jesus is doing what he always does. He is gently showing people who God really is, nurturing them towards the relationship that God wants with his people. Our actions must match who we are, says Jesus. If you are children of God, then act like it. See what I do. You should not separate your deeds from authenticity and integrity with your inner world/self/belief. Not for the first time, Jesus is demonstrating that what comes out of us should show who we are. This should be true even in the most testing of times.

As I was queuing to pick up a prescription the other day, there were twenty-five of us spread out of the dispensary door, all round the car park at 2m intervals. It took 45 minutes for something that usually takes 5 at the most. I was asking myself if I would really give up my place in the queue once I had got near the front if a disabled person arrived, who could not stand for long. I hope I would, if my actions are to speak of the faith I hold. It is hard to exercise patience and self-restraint, to walk the extra mile, or to sacrifice your time and energy for someone else, especially if you are having to live on top of them and everyone is anxious and fearful. But it is the smallest kindnesses that build up hope and restore faith. To read that a quarter of a million people in the UK had offered to help the National Health Service care for the most vulnerable of those self-isolating – and on the first day of the appeal – was uplifting. We in our turn could try a smile across the breakfast table, holding fast when someone else does not want to chat, making a phone call to [someone living on their own](#), or...?

Those would be actions. What [about](#) the heart that generates them? When Jesus moves on and escapes arrest in our story, he heads for the Jordan, where John the Baptist had been baptising. He goes to where his public ministry all began. Crowds again come to him as they did to John. Folk are still seeking God and a message that will give hope and purpose to their lives. They see something in Jesus and in his authenticity that they want to gain more of. The integrity and sincerity, the “fit” between what he says or does and who he is opens a window onto both who God is and who we can be. And it draws many to believe.

We too can go back to the beginnings. Take a few minutes to reflect on how, and where, and when, and why your Christian journey started. Look again at what it was drew you to Jesus in the first place. Perhaps imagine you are with him at the Jordan as you reflect. What stands out? Take whatever it is, good or ill, difficult or glorious to the Lord in your prayers. Let him heal, speak.

Hands who touched the leper, touch my wounded heart;
hands who healed the blind, heal my aching soul;
hands who cured the lame, mend my disjointed life,
enfold me in your peace.

Commented [J2]: The grammar of this feels a bit off to me. Would it be better to say “table, holding fast...making a phone call”?

| Lord, merely touch and heal, cure and forgive.

(Giles Harcourt)

