Diocesan Synod 120316

John 7: 40-52

‘Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him’

With a smile, I wonder why that phrase leapt out of today’s gospel reading. There was a division in the crowd as they wondered about Jesus. Some of them feared what he represented and believed that he was profoundly wrong. Others wondered – and indeed feared – that he might just be speaking truth at the deepest level - that he might be profoundly right.

All of us together are involved in leadership in our church. That is part of the role of the Diocesan Synod. It’s an element of what clergy do. It’s also part of what Lay Representatives are for. We fulfil many roles – representative, pastoral, teaching, healing. But we also offer leadership. And that’s what this afternoon’s session is meant to be about. It’s an opportunity for us to reflect on ‘Growing Congregations, Changing Communities’ – both statements which can be read in two different ways as we reflect together on the life of our church in a changing context.

The leadership of Jesus was rooted in trust. The disciples pledged themselves to follow him wherever he might go. And so they did until it all became too much and they found themselves running away. All of us know that leadership is rooted in good relationships – people won’t go anywhere with you unless they trust you. They need to believe that you understand them at the deepest level, that you are prepared to listen as well as speak and that you have only their ultimate good in view.

So we have to ask why people sometimes find our leadership infuriating – to the point of considering arrest. Well no doubt that’s sometimes because our leadership is inept and seems unsympathetic and unworthy of trust. But it may also be because of where it is rooted – the listening to which I referred a moment ago may be a listening to God and not just to people.

Jeremiah has ‘committed his cause’ to almighty God. He stands firmly in that expression of leadership which we call prophetic – the leadership which says, ‘Thus says the Lord’ – the leadership which, however gently it does it, cannot help but give expression to what it believes to be right. And Jesus is the same only more so. He isn’t a political leader who simply listens to the voice of the people or responds to his calculation of where the best political advantage lies. Jesus is beyond that kind of accountability and therefore beyond control. So of course some wanted to arrest him.

Our journey together in faith expresses many things – our life and human experience. It expresses and ministers to our joys and sorrows – particularly in events like the Dunblane tragedy. It says something about who we are and our identity as a people. But God always calls us to more – calls us to transcend all those categories – calls us sometimes to turn aside from things which others feel are important for the sake of the gospel. That is why the journey of faith is on one level natural, wholesome and encouraging – and on others deeply challenging and uncomfortable.

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