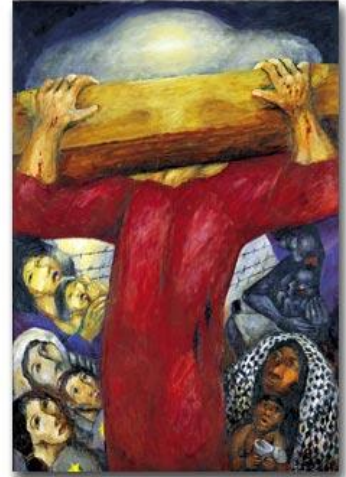


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Dear Friends,

*"Now is the judgment 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: 31-33)*

Now and again some of the most worrying stories are forgotten or hidden because our collective minds are focussed elsewhere. The worrying announcement by the government that it intends to increase the UK's nuclear weapons capacity seems to have gained very little air time or space in our newspapers. The plan seems to overturn decades of efforts to reduce our nuclear stockpile. Is this a wise investment when the rates of poverty, unemployment and hunger are increasing? I thought responsible nations were working to reduce, and one day remove, the nuclear threat from the world. Perhaps you noticed that the policy paper also referred briefly to a cut in the UK aid budget? MPs from all parties were expected to defeat the government's move, yet on Tuesday Boris Johnson said that since this drop in overseas spending was temporary no vote would be permitted. It is very strange how democracy works.



Perhaps I am deluded, but does this government really believe we are so set on eradicating Covid that we have forgotten the indiscriminate and destructive power of nuclear weapons or that we no longer wish to give generously to those in less affluent parts of the world? Today it is reported that wealthy countries, including the UK, are blocking proposals to help developing nations increase their vaccine manufacturing capabilities. I had hoped that Covid would make us a gentler more thoughtful and generous nation.

In contrast, it has been announced that next Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, will be a National Day of Reflection. I hope you will take time to light a candle, to say prayers for the departed, to mourn those you have loved and lost as well as those whose names are known to God alone. As we reflect on this past year we give thanks for those who work on the front line. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to all whose skill and dedication, care and compassion have the power to save and heal.

Tomorrow, as we gather to worship on Zoom, hear words from John's gospel proclaimed and listen to Bishop June's homily "Enduring to the end", we may be struck by the plethora of unforgettable phrases in the gospel narrative appointed for Passion Sunday. If you cannot join worship on line or hear the recording of +June's sermon, do read John 12:20-33 and ponder its meaning. There are so many phrases that challenge us and help us think about how we should respond to threats to our wellbeing in the world.



It is the festival of Passover and Jerusalem is flooded with pilgrims arriving to celebrate. When some Greeks, that is those outside the covenant, come longing to see Jesus he begins to tell his disciples what lies ahead saying, "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified".

John, the gospel writer, sets out his understanding of the hard and painful work of the cross. "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". Just as the grain that I eat must die that I can live, so too, says Jesus, one man must die that others will live. As he puts it "those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"

John's Jesus does not simply speak about the forgiveness of my personal sins and he's certainly not saying that Jesus will take on the punishment that I deserve so that I can be forgiven. John's gospel says that the crucifixion of Jesus judges "the world" and "drives out the ruler of the world"

When we read this part of John's gospel we must try not to think of God's generous gifts to us in creation for the "world" that John refers to is the worldly system made in man's image and divorced from God's will. This world system is built today by businesses, organisations, nations and governments who hold each one of us captive to their ways. And this worldly system, life blood or driving force, is here referred to as "the ruler of the world" whose ways are violence and death. In today's gospel the world's system is judged as the driving force or "ruler" and it is "cast out" by the cross" The "myth of redemptive violence" is overturned by the power of the cross on which a man dies whispering words of love and forgiveness even to those who set out to destroy him. In this myth, the way to bring order to our world is to defeat the other through aggression or the threat of aggression. The myth tells us all will be well if we can eliminate the other through force. We've been teaching this to our children for generations - watch cartoons, look at the bestselling video games and box office hits. We are unwittingly captive to this myth.

Yet, as Jesus prepares for the hour when he will be glorified, he refuses to be part of the lie. When he stands before Pilate he names and shames the myth saying "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over.....my kingdom is not from here" (John 18.36). His rejection of violence is what separates him from the way of the "world". On the cross, Jesus exposes our broken world, showing it to be not the way of life but the way of death. In doing so he casts out the spirit of this world and invites you and me to see the system for what it really is. The cross sets you and me free to die to a life shaped by the world, the myth, the system and live the life of Jesus.

Here is an invitation to an alternative way of life and every time we break bread and share wine we are reminded that this love alone has the power to make us whole and heal our broken world

With love,

**Vicki  
X**

(Note: Images taken from Sieger Koder's stations of the cross)

