

I wonder what Amnesty International would make of the trial of Jesus, if it were to be held nowadays. Perhaps 'trial' is too grand a word to use, actually, for a process that seems to have had no proper provision for advocacy, no rules of evidence and no independent judiciary, and in which, all too obviously, each of the frightened accusing parties is desperate to preserve their own interest. Early Christian writers, drawing on their own Jewish traditions from the book of Leviticus, used the idea of the scapegoat to put the trial into perspective. According to Leviticus chapter 16, a community can be cleansed of all its problems, its iniquities and sins by ritually transferring them to a goat, which is then driven out into a barren place where it is released in the wilderness. It has become the scapegoat.

The term 'scapegoat' is well understood in modern society. Communities still attempt to transfer their ills on to some vulnerable and essentially innocent group in society in the belief, born of denial, that all will be well as a result. And indeed, trials of individuals, such as that endured by Jesus, are part of the everyday experience of groups such as Amnesty International who make it their business to monitor these things and campaign for justice. Their religious base in London is the Church of All Hallows by the Tower, which is also our diocesan London home.

What makes a reading of the story of the Passion, the suffering of Jesus, so compelling is in fact that it contains what are for us, some of the most recognisable contemporary images. We may find it difficult to identify with healing people possessed by demons or with miraculous walking on water, but we have no difficulty at all identifying in our own society the political machinations, the

corruption and intrigue, the power-hungry motivations that accompanied the trial of Jesus.

But the key question is, as with all Bible reading, what difference should reading this account make to us? Do we simply read it with an objective cynicism about politics, or do we read it, recognising in ourselves and our attitudes, the very things that make such scenes possible? We might make a list of all the people that our society scapegoats. That would surely involve all foreigners (though with different degrees of foreign-ness perhaps) along with those who upset our settledness, such as refugees, trafficked women, the disabled, and those with different or no religious affiliation, not to mention sexual orientation. What are our attitudes towards those groups and how were those attitudes formed? Do they change when we come into contact, as many of us have recently, with individuals who are refugees for instance? One contemporary American Christian writer speaks of the ways in which the powerful teach us to hate. Have we succumbed to that?

The trial of Jesus is a travesty of justice, but what do we mean by justice? Do we follow the popular line that justice involves doing bad things to people who have themselves done bad things – in other words a socially acceptable form of revenge? Or do we see injustice in the unequal distribution of the world's resources and riches and opportunities?

Holy Week only works when we see ourselves in the story. And Easter only really affects us when we see what forgiveness, redemption and sacrifice can achieve for us.

A Happy and blessed Easter to you all.

Services for Holy Week and Easter at St Helena's

Palm Sunday (March 20th)

9.30 Holy Eucharist .There will be blessing and procession with palms at this service

Wednesday in Holy Week (March 23rd)

The Lenten Course continues at 2.30pm in church

Maundy Thursday (March 24th)

A Tenebrae service starting at 6pm. This service is of readings accompanied by the gradual extinguishing of lights. Tenebrae means 'shadows.' A similar service is celebrated in Orthodox Churches on Good (Great) Friday morning.

Good Friday (March 25th)

A Devotional Service based on the Stations of the Cross. The service begins at 1.30pm and lasts until 3, but there is opportunity to come and go and to stay for just ten minutes or for the whole time. The service will include hymns, prayers, reading and reflection.

Easter Day (March 27th)

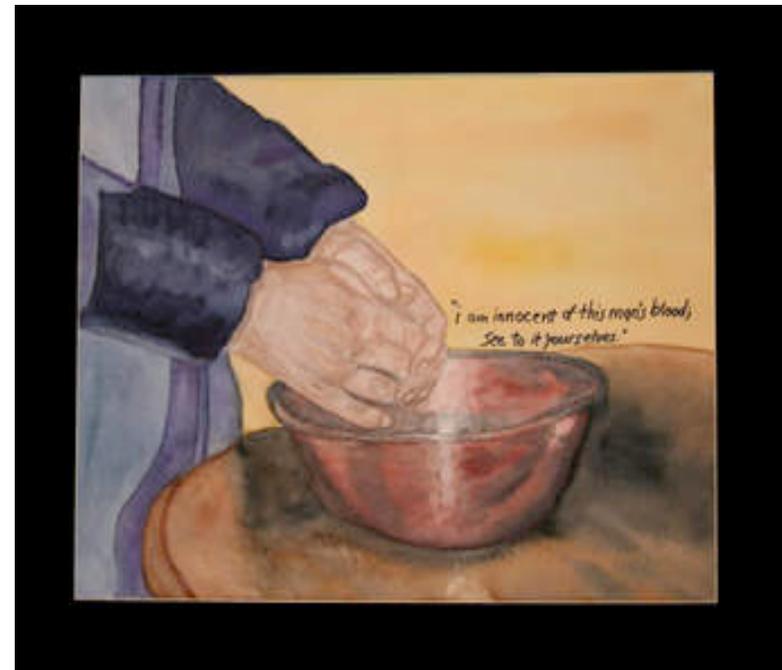
9.30 Holy Communion

Easter Tuesday (March 29th)

6.30 pm Songs of Praise for Easter at the Pervolia charity shop

We meet for worship at 9.30 every Sunday. Coffee is served in the courtyard after the service. You are welcome.

St Helena's Anglican Church, Larnaca



Pastoral Letter

Passiontide and Easter 2016