

Along the track

Crucify Him!

It is easy enough to stir up a crowd, whip up anger, to find a quick answer to a problem, to play on fear and suspicion. It was in Jesus' day too.

Early in the week the people were welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem:

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Mt 21 8-11

What an extraordinary scene. The praise could not be higher; the excitement sweeps through the crowd. The people are out in force. But those in charge are not. They feel threatened.

Four days later, the same crowd is calling for his execution.

Can't you see it now – the whispering campaign against him. He is a threat to our way of life. How will the Romans respond? He mixes with the wrong crowd. He has no respect for our religious beliefs and practices. He wants to change them. He doesn't keep the Sabbath. Whipping up suspicion, making him an 'outsider', not to be trusted, threatening our way of life, challenging what we hold dear and so on and so on. He's an extremist! Find a charge, any charge. Make it stick.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."... So from that day on they plotted to take his life. John 11 454 - 53

When change is in the air, when the going is tough as it was under the Romans, making something black and white is made so much easier. We like things to be simple, uncomplicated. Easier to sell, easier to 'explain.' – the attitude that things are bad enough now, we

don't need this. He is a challenge to our way of life. So make up a few charges, twist his words, quote selectively, make what he says a threat to peace and order:

"We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."

"He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

Very clever tactics. He wants to overthrow everything! So now the crowds are calling: Crucify him! Crucify him!

Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty Pilate says. *But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed.*

Their shouts prevailed. Sadly that can be the case so often today. The loudest voices are the ones often heard, perhaps not at first but loud, insistent demanding can win the day, despite the truth at times. Create doubt, play on fear, make things simple, a quick, seemingly easy solution. So pick a slogan. We hear 'crucify him' in all sorts of different forms today.

Surely a free society is one characterised by decency in how it treats others. A welcoming and mature church (and the society in which it lives) is one that seeks the truth, one that goes beyond the simple slogan, one that can welcome diversity and entertain complexity.

Some weeks before this trial, Matthew tells us, that *they looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd... Mtt 21: 46*

We can react to fear in a number of ways. We can ask ourselves, why is it that we are afraid? We can seek to understand our own reaction and what motivates it. We can also try to stand in the others' shoes. How much do we know about 'the other'? Have we been fed mistruths like Pilate? Or are we like those feeling threatened in Jesus' time, like those who agitated to have Jesus executed. Get rid of the threat.

We hear 'crucify him' (or them) in very clever ways today.

Regards
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