

## **An Easter Triptych – Reflections on Easter Weekend 2016**

### **The Wheelchair of Witness – Good Friday**

While St David's Kids make their Easter Garden  
And St Mike's sings Reproaches, Τρισάγιον and Venerates the Crux Fidelis,  
Wheelchair and I go ecumenical with the full house at Exeter Cathedral,  
Where hands-on welcomers are out in force, not asking permission to touch,  
So the hypersensory, neurodiverse must brave the well-meaning crowd  
Of hand-shakers and asymmetric shoulder patters.

The Passion is an engaging modern translation well-read,  
The Sermon a fresh audio-clip take on the standard evangelical,  
Friendly Intro, Disarming Humour, Emotional Blackmail, Commitment Required.  
The Prayers well-meant but patronising, in that binary sort of way  
Where we Christians are all whole and the World is all broken,  
Those lesser Christians with disability or depression cause pity or embarrassment,  
And the poor and needy and hurting are all out there in the city.

We both agree that the Music is sadly totally naff.  
There are so many deeply moving, well-trying, singable Passiontide Hymns,  
So why inflict Worship Group Songs with mediocre lyrics and boring tunes?  
Jesus you're so beautiful! On many days, yes, but not today,  
When we are so brutal, and you're still not my boyfriend.  
Framing Watts' "When I survey the wondrous Cross" with Celtic sunrise and starlight,  
And a low-key tune that's not "Rockin'em", just shows the gap.

So out we all go to walk or roll behind Jesus on his donkey as our witness  
To Exeter High Street, doing "Glory to God in the High St." in an ordered English way.  
Then wait somewhat deflated till the Sally Army Band strikes up a proper hymn.  
There is a Green Hill not so far away, outside the Cathedral West Front,  
Where our Dear Lord will be crucified again.



The drama is good this year, no attempt to update, upstage or dumb down the narrative.

A simple al fresco meditation on familiar words from Scripture and the spiritual

Were you There? Were You there? Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

With horrors daily on our news-feeds, it's not the brutality of the crowd or the soldiers,

Nor the expediency of the authorities, Pilate washing his hands of it, that surprises,

But the resolute obedience and gentleness of Christ going to his Cross for us, with us, as us.

Lord of all hopefulness and faithfulness, loneliness and loveliness.

God in Christ paying the price of sin in the blood-stained coinage of costly forgiveness,

And also, perhaps, saying sorry to humanity that in this evolutionary Universe

Loving and growing can only be incarnate with a side order of pain and loss.

A kind of Second Law of Theodynamics; that's my slightly heretical thought.

But wait, there's a Second Act – the God-man is back

And we touch his robe as he strides past us to amaze his doubting disciples.

Still we want no miraculous healing. The world has bigger problems, surely,

And God made us this way to trust and serve him as we are, in all our complexities.



Those who know they are a little damaged come quietly in the shadows of the evening  
To St Michael's Transpontferro for the multi-lingual Office of Tenebrae.  
The Lassus polyphony of the Hebrew letters, Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Dalek,  
Illuminates the musical manuscript of the Cantor's Latin Plainsong.  
The Lamentations and darker Psalms, the Responds and Song of Hezekiah,  
The strange Readings of the ways of the Ungodly and the need for Blood,  
All seem prophetic of this deep night of descent into darkness,  
Yet also familiar to those who have known troubled times.

Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in a place of darkness, and in the deep.  
And we leave, not in despair, but with a quiet waiting hopefulness  
That the faithfulness, loneliness and loveliness of Christ and of his Church  
Will spring forth like the hidden grain.

### **Noli Me Tangere**

Noli me tangere. Don't touch me!

Why? Rabboni, Teacher, Lord, Master, Doctor, Gardener, Saviour, Jesus?

Have I become unclean, or are you too pure for me to touch you now?

I, Mary of Magdala, who washed your feet with my tears,

And dried them with my golden hair just a month ago.

Or is your resurrection body still too new, too sensitive,

Regeneration too unfamiliar, too unsteady in this pre-dawn hour?

Another week and Thomas gets the full guided tour, hands, feet, side.

But I have been written out by time, translation, patriarchy.

Your Aramaic was not quite so brusque.

“Mary, you don't need to cling to me, I'll always be with you now.”

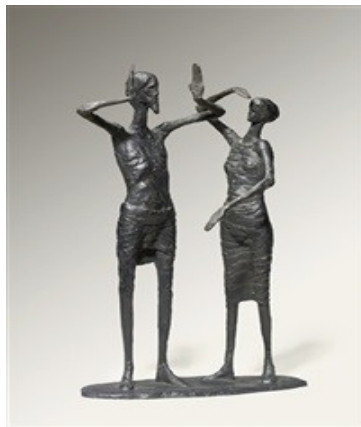
And John then wrote it μή μου ἄπτου meaning “stop clinging to me”.

The Latin Church made it “don't touch me” in ascetic St Jerome's Vulgate.

The old story of Roman excesses spawning Puritan repressions even then.

Good for paintings by Fra Angelico et al., or a statue by Wynne in Ely,

But not for my reputation.



Today, Easter in Exeter, all our thoughts and touches, clean or unclean,

Sacred or carnal, are purified by your love for humanity in all our waywardness.

Across the city this Passiontide the magnolia candles have been the cups

From which you drink sweet joy or bitter loss as you pass by.

So now, with bushes budding, blossom blushing, branches bearing their first green tints,

With daffodils nodding and lambs gambolling in the lush meadows,

As vibrant voices of men and maidens raise you out of the stillness with dancing emotions,

I will weave a new and verdant crown of gentler sprigs and softer colours

To place upon your bloodied head and soothe the rawness of your wounds, my Jesus.

## **Easter Monday – After Storm Katie**

Mares' tails swish the sky clean from last night's Easter storm.

Great swathes of baptismal water cover the fields and corral the ewes to higher ground.

Bright sheets of water that would in Dickensian, Prayer Book days

Have been vast ice rinks twirling with muffled skaters.

Cotton wool clouds rise to wipe the dreamy from the sleepless eyes

Of those so excited, so amazed by the events, so divine, of this Holy Week.

In the garden, as nesting birds twitter their dawn song,

Sunshine warms the faces and dries the tears,

And a gentler wind ruffles the flowing hair, of his most intimate followers.

Men in white raiment have dropped their script to roll the song away -

Blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord. Blessed!

Girls in red cassocks have risen out of the stillness

And cannot help but laugh and dance before the Lord and sing Alleluia!

Delighting in sixth century words of Venantius Fortunatus, *Salve festa dies*,

In a ten-fold multiverse paean of praise, in themes that could have come from Iona.

Lo, the fair beauty of earth, from the death of the winter arising,

Every good gift of the year now with its Master returns.

*Hail thee, festival day! Blest day that art hallowed forever;*

*Day wherein Christ arose, breaking the kingdom of death.*

Richard Barnes – Easter Weekend 25-28 March 2016.