

It's hard to put yourself in the position of someone who becomes a suicide bomber. Kamikaze pilots or allied troops volunteering for hopeless missions in the second world war were willing to give their lives for their country. They came from military traditions, cherishing honour and valuing self-sacrifice. But what is happening when civilians, women as well as men, blow themselves up and take the lives of fellow citizens, plus foreign soldiers, with no clear aim other than sowing further chaos? Such people aren't always ignorant, poor or obviously mentally ill. They aren't always under the thrall of an evil mind, persuading them back is white, and white is black. Nor are they all poor folk exchanging their lives for a pension from terrorist pay masters to feed their family, when they've failed to provide by any other means. They can be well educated, choose freely for themselves to bring random death to others. Something must be seriously wrong in the world to produce people who make such choices. What drives them?

When a culture, a whole way of life, a vision of the future, is overshadowed and threatened, when people's freedom and security is lost to the point where they feel the survival of family, tribe, nation, religion, culture is threatened, desperation sets in. It drives a few beyond caution or prudence, to consider how they can invest the remains of their liberty in action, whether as protest or to avenge the plight of their people. It's a move to redistribute some of the violence and suffering their kindred has received. They want others to feel the suffering they and theirs have suffered. That's what we learn from Afghanistan, Iraq, the Holy Land, and even from the few in the UK, Japan, Germany, the US and other countries who have turned to suicide terrorism. A similar logic too for the lone gunman on a spree of murder ending in suicide. I will make you suffer until you stop me suffering. It's the perverse logic behind all punishment, all retaliation for offences.

Setting aside the fact that a hundred Palestinians have died in Gaza for each Israeli death in last year's war, neither party flinches from the conviction that violence will achieve their aims. There's no shame at the absurdity and wickedness of it all. It is the logic of the devil at work. The devil, whose name means divider, author of chaos.

Two centuries before Jesus, Jewish heroes died refusing to defend themselves from armies attacking on the Sabbath, but soon, faced with desperation, others chose to fight on the Sabbath, claiming God's permission to defend their land and faith from destruction by foreign colonisers. In Jesus' time, the Zealot party, believed it could overthrow the Romans by violence. They dealt in terror attacks, with suicide squads ready to channel their despair into futile killing in the face of overwhelming military force. Paradoxically, the violence of the Cross confounds all dependency on violence. It's essential we remind ourselves on this holy day of Him who chose to suffer for the sake of others, rather than impose suffering on others. "*It is necessary*", Jesus said; "*That the Son of the Man should suffer ...*"

The apostles speak of Him bearing our burden of sin on the Cross, of shouldering the violence of punishment so that the world may no more have to punish or be punished. Jesus took his inspiration from the Suffering Servant poetry of the prophet Isaiah.

He identified with the figure called and blessed by God, of whom Isaiah spoke "*He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. By his wounds we are healed.*"

Jesus realised the logic of putting an end to the age old habit of retaliation, arresting the violent response with an act of forgiveness, bearing the pain of being sinned against, not requiring anyone else to be hurt. To sin is to cause suffering, to be sinned against is to undergo suffering. To experience betrayal, to be a crime victim, to be assaulted by the malicious thoughts and intentions of another arouses our anger and emotional pain. It can be so strong as to affect us physically, like an injury. Have you ever experienced that? The loneliness, the desire for revenge, and punishment for our assailant which it awakens. It comes from the need to know that others feel what I am feeling, therefore I cannot be so alone that I think I'm going to be annihilated.

As we follow Jesus in the travels of his ministry, we see how concerned he is to do something about people's suffering, by acts of healing, by accepting the rejected, by pardoning the guilty, raising up the downcast. His teaching like his deeds, declares that God wants everyone to be whole, freed from suffering, rejoicing in freedom, safe in knowing they are loved and welcomed as God's children, no matter who they are.

He won't be deterred from proclaiming that the kingdom of God, God's reign, means just these things, that all practice of religion should serve this end - setting the world free from the suffering of sin, by practising healing and forgiveness.

Because he had such a clear and practical vision, Jesus clashed with all those devout folk who took refuge from real suffering in religious piety. He called them hypocrites. Play actors, the word means. In this he comes close to consigning the conventional worship of his time to the realm of entertainment. In this he is faithful to the spirit of Isaiah and other prophets *"Is not this the kind of fasting I choose: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"*

Jesus doesn't condemn religious ritual, but insists that it takes proper meaning from *'doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God'* in everyday affairs.

His actions and message must have seemed like a radical challenge, a threat to the established religious authorities who ran the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrificial rituals. They believed this defined their identity as Jews, and their claim to own this land in which generations of Jews had looked to from all directions, to Jerusalem with its Temple as the centre of their world.

What would Wales be without its great Cathedrals. St David's, Bangor, Llandaff?

Secular society may be indifferent to what they stand for, apart from their architectural history, but what about us? Isn't their spiritual meaning part of our identity?

Yet, if Jesus was with us, no matter how much delight he'd share with us in our sacred places, his interest and attention would be the poor, the deprived, those who suffer, in need of healing, peace, reconciliation. There are plenty of sufferers, as there ever was.

We could confuse his different interests with secularist indifference. When Jesus debated priorities with the religious scholars of the holy city, he exposed their faults, challenged their values. His attention was always on God and on our need for God. Instead of awakening consciences, He aroused resentment. They began to consider how they could get rid of him.

Not long before his final entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was at Bethany where he'd raised his friend Lazarus to life from the tomb. It was a healing so dramatic, nobody could keep quiet about it. More began to follow him than ever. The authorities wondered how not to lose control.

*"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." One of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize? 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."*

The story allows us to sense the fear expressed in their thought. Fear of losing power, fear that violence would break out and destroy the nation they strived to hold together with their protective religious measures and control of small privileges. Can we see ourselves, faced with similar dilemmas? Who is this man, who has done no violence, yet arouses such fears in them, in us?

The voice of common sense declares it is expedient one man die, that the problem he causes by being who he is will soon be eliminated and security restored. Now here's a practical doctrine that's stood the test of time, in dictatorships, and faith communities down the ages. Ironically it always ends in failure. You can kill those who do the truth, but not truth itself. Truth will out, and will change the world, sooner or later. Enter Judas Iscariot, reformed Zealot, in love with the words and deeds of Jesus. He has exchanged the terrorist mindset of despair for the promising of hope in God, shown by Jesus. Judas thinks this man who can change lives, can change the world. He thinks he understands the action plan. He sees how the leaders hate Jesus. If only he can bring them all together, Jesus can show them, convince them He has the power and authority to take the nation where its leaders want it to be.

Judas wants to be a power broker. But he's impatient at that evening meal in Bethany, when Mary anoints Jesus' feet in a surprise act of loving devotion.

Jesus defends her against his criticism of wastefulness, appreciating the love her act represents. Judas fails to comprehend what Jesus implies, speaking of this deed as an

anticipation of his burial. He cannot accept, given Jesus' ability to work wonders, that the poor will be there always.

He lives in the land of illusion, where Satan tester of men leads him, to seek a way to hand Jesus over to the authorities - Judas believes it'll make decisive confrontation possible. He can't believe he's read the situation wrong. He acts in what he's sure is Jesus' best interests. The opposite of faith is certainty, rather than doubt - the same certainty possessing those who believe that violence can ever be a cure for violence, whether suicide bomber, or advocates of nuclear deterrence. In his certainty Judas is the most impoverished of men. Can you see yourself in him sometimes?