

THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM SPEAK WITH JESUS

Dominic Melville writes...

This encounter from the gospel of St Luke is often referred to as Jesus “consoling the women of Jerusalem”

But there’s not much consoling about his words! Jesus warns the women of Jerusalem, challenges them. They weep for him.

They might be women who had followed him, who had found their dignity honoured by this man unlike so many others. Now they mourn for him, and grieve see their hopes and dreams broken and a man they care for beaten and condemned.

They might be women who wept for all the condemned men who had no-one else to weep for them, a kind of defiant charity that ensured that none went unmourned in a system which treated criminals as those deserved no pity and no dignity.

But whatever brings them here, Jesus directs their sorrow away from his plight, to think of the wider implications for themselves and their children.

Injustice against him now could mean worse for them in the years to come and a less compassionate or humane world for their children.. They are mothers: they will shape the next generation by how they raise their children. They have a living investment in the future.

Jesus speaks about the present time as one “when the wood is green”, the future as the time when “the wood is dry” It always makes me conscious of our care for the environment at this point. And not only for ourselves. For those whose crops and livelihoods are far less stable than our own, and who will have no welfare state for support; who face flood or drought or the seizure of their land, locusts or encroaching war.

Jesus, in the midst of his own suffering, thinks not only of himself, though at this point he would have every right. He looks beyond the horizon of his own need to the needs of others, and that takes courage as well as compassion.

In our present crisis, everything is strange. For us, covid 19 engenders fear, anxiety, grief and loss. We need to be attentive to what is going on on our own doorstep. But that should not blind us to need of others.

In prisons of refugee camps where social isolation and basic hygiene is almost impossible.

In India or Bangladesh, where the rural poor have few resources and water can be scarce.

If anything ever taught us that the suffering of one is the suffering of all, the global nature of this pandemic reminds us of that.

And that, to my mind, is what Jesus is challenging these women from the city to realise.