

I grew up in Birmingham in the 50's and 60's. It was the time of the Cold War. I remember vividly the fear that went through Britain during the Cuban Missile Crisis, as the world teetered on the edge of nuclear conflict. Reports of espionage trials, trials of those accused of spying for Russia, would appear in the paper from time to time.

I recall as a youngster, as one of these trials was featuring in a radio news bulletin, asking my mother the meaning of the word treason. Remember at that stage the ravages of the 2nd World War were still a recent memory. I remember my mother saying that she felt to betray your country was an awful thing to do. Treason, treachery always attracted the severest of penalties. In Tudor times it was to be hung, drawn and quartered. In more recent times terrorist groups in the North abandoned the bodies of suspected traitors in unmarked graves.

And so the figure of Judas has always attracted particular dislike as the story of the Last Supper, the Betrayal in the Garden has been told. The thought that one of the closest confidants of Jesus, who had seen him heal, seen him feed the crowds, heard him preach; one of those who had walked the hills and roads of Galilee – the thought just seems to much.

Of course there has been endless speculation as to what prompted Judas to do this. Was it sheer greed, was it the action of a deeply disillusioned man – had Jesus fallen so short of his expectations of what a Messiah would be like? Some have even argued that he was trying to force Jesus' hand so that once he was in the hands of the authorities, facing death he would have to act to bring

in the Kingdom. This is what I said, speculation and no more than that. But there is a common thread running through all the suggestions that I think gives us food to think about in our own reflections. It is the matter of agendas – Judas bringing something of his own agenda to how he saw things working out.

It is easy to distance ourselves from the figure of Judas but if I am brutally honest, there is very possibly something of Judas in each one of us. This is where the subject of agendas comes to my mind. I can offer my service – but it can be on my terms. I can bring my own expectations to things and if these are not met then I can withdraw my service, my support. We can couch this very politely, even under the cloak of principle. Jesus, for whatever reasons, disappointed Judas, did not meet Judas' expectations – and Judas left the light and the fellowship and walked out into the night.

As the door closes behind him Jesus says a remarkable thing.

Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.

As we progress through John's Gospel towards the Cross – it becomes increasingly clear that the coming sacrifice is one that is freely embraced. This is not something that happens to Jesus – this is something that Jesus does, freely and willingly. He will stand before Pilate – in John's account it is not so much a matter of Pilate interrogating Jesus, it is Jesus who is in control. As he dies on the Cross, John tells us of Jesus proclaiming, 'It is finished'. The task is done, the job is accomplished. I recall Professor Vokes, who lectured us in St John's Gospel declaring that John presents us with a picture of Jesus reigning from the Cross.

And it all begins with Judas walking out into the dark.

What all this reminds me is that God's purposes in me, in you, in the Church are not limited by my own narrow vision, my own limited agendas. God works in and through me, through you, through the Church in all its imperfection. God chooses to work in and through us but he is not limited by us. Jesus had called Judas to follow him but Jesus was not going to be limited by the limitations of Judas.

We come to God as we are, in all our limitations, all our imperfections, all our limited agendas. God takes us as we are, loves us as we are, seeks to work in and through us. God is glorified even in our failure, even in our inadequacy – for nothing, not even us, can ultimately frustrate his purposes of love for all mankind.