

Address by Howard Friend for 8th May 2022

In plain sight.

I wonder what that phrase conjures up for you ? One of its current popular usages has a very negative connotation: I'm sure I'm not the only one who immediately thinks of criminals like Harold Shipman and Jimmy Saville who break the law but are so brazen about it - that somehow we're taken in. There's almost an element of 'Catch me if you can' about such behaviour.

In plain sight. Base Criminality with a veneer of respectability.

In plain sight

Now – paradoxically - that's the phrase that came to my mind as I read our Gospel this week – except of course here it has a quite different, and positive interpretation.

In plain sight

Manifest goodness that was disbelieved.

Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, living and acting like the real deal, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, performing miracles, – Right in front of everybody's eyes - and still many wouldn't believe him.

And we get a glimpse of Jesus's frustration here – because this episode is just the culmination of an ongoing tussle between him and the Jewish leaders.

What's the truth of the matter. And how do you get at that truth?

That's my strapline this morning.

Think Pilate, for whom I've come to have some sympathy – What is truth?

Well - Appearances can be deceptive. Sometimes you have to dig deeper to find the truth.

Let's return to our two criminals momentarily.

(Joke)

Anyway – back to our serious subject – for a moment.

This respected GP was not rumbled despite the fact that deaths occurred amongst his patients 10 X more often than normal. The evidence was there for his colleagues to see – if they'd been more circumspect.

And in the case of Jimmy Saville – as I learned this week from an article in the Guardian - years before he was finally caught - a journalist had established credible evidence from some of his earliest victims but her newspaper didn't publish - for fear of being bankrupted by Saville's lawyers. Libel law in this country is heavily weighted in favour of the one being libelled. There is no effective Public Interest clause in the current legislation, as I understand it - which is what she was arguing is necessary.

How do we get at the truth? That's the big question that this Gospel reading throws at us. (The Jewish leaders were interested in finding the Messiah - let's give them credit - but they were blinded from seeing him because of their tradition and prejudice.) How do we get at the truth – well a simple test is:-

Truth is as truth does.

A caring GP doesn't kill his patients. A celebrity, charity fundraiser for children's causes doesn't violate them.

And in this Gospel passage Jesus, almost losing patience with his detractors, says in effect. I'm here 'IN PLAIN SIGHT' - the evidence is right in front of you if you would only open your eyes.

I was born in Bethlehem, of the lineage of David. They had overlooked this. And it's an important qualification for the Messiah. Yes - I come from Nazareth, Galilee, and yes I am only a carpenter's son and didn't go to Theological School. But put aside your prejudice, and your preconceived ideas.

Truth is as truth does.
(Look at the miracles)

Love is as love does.

Don't we all recognise that?

Don't just believe him if he says he loves you. Isn't that what we tell our daughters. To which we might add :- And be slightly suspicious of flowers!

So we get to know the truth - I suggest – in large part by examining the integrity of the person propounding that truth.

I've honed in on this subject of truth because of its huge importance in our internet / social media world today where we're bombarded with lies masquerading as truth.

If you murder civilians in your neighbouring country – you are not bringing them back into the fold of the motherland.

If you do not accept the result of an election verified by an independent body and judiciary and then attempt a coup d'état - it is a truth universally acknowledged that you are not fit to be a President in a democracy.

The evidence is there 'IN PLAIN SIGHT'

Now here's an interesting thing about truth - and our awareness of it - in this post Easter period - as Helen pointed this out to me after Ash's sermon last week. I get a lot of my original ideas from her. That's the truth.

It took Simon Peter three 'gos' to recognise and accept the Risen Lord – one for each denial perhaps?

And - we can be similarly slow to realise God's love for us. Truth very often does - just - dawn - on us. (No flashing lights)

But if we, like Simon Peter - dare to say - after the umpteenth time of God asking, Do you love me - Yes Lord - you know that I love you –

THEN :-

Truth and love must be evident in our lives

Not hidden

But (be) :-

'IN PLAIN SIGHT'