

When Jeremiah is cast into the well, or cistern, full of mud it's because he speaks a truth that other people do not wish to hear. One could say this just as well of the many protesters recently arrested for speaking out against Israel's actions in Gaza and the West Bank, or of the climate change activists chaining themselves to motorway gantries and so on, or of the pro-lifers arrested for praying silently outside abortion clinics. They are speaking truths which others do not wish to hear. It's a dynamic with a long pedigree. We are free at the moment to worship together in this most beautiful church, but it has not always been so. When we visited Drayton House, the ancestral home of the Mordaunts after John the first Lord Mordaunt married into the de Vere family, the Rev. Jo Spray remarked on how the political fortunes of the family often influenced their religious affiliation, and of course vice-versa. It was politic to have at least one son a Protestant to preserve the family inheritance even as others such as Henry, the fourth lord, languished in the Tower because of his Catholic loyalties, and in particular his possible association with the Gunpowder Plot. And preserve their fortunes they did though often out of favour at court. What I hadn't realised until reading Pevsner afterwards was that directly above the most magnificent four poster bed in the royal bed chamber was a priest-hole – which says everything about the need of this family to navigate very carefully through the troubled waters of their day and of the risks they were prepared to take for their faith, for their take one might say, on what it means to be a Christian. Protestants of course have also suffered for their faith, for their protest against a Christianity gone astray, for their take on the truth. And there we come to the nub of the problem -how do we navigate truth, how do we know that our truth is the truth and worth dying for? When Pilate asks Jesus, “*What is truth?*” Jesus gives no answer except for standing there confronting Pilate with his own humanity . The tragedy of Pilate is that he cannot allow his own humanity to rise to the occasion, to find within himself that mercy which characterises us as creatures made in the image of God. You could call it a failure of will, or of character, but it is above all a failure of the imagination, of the realisation of that image in himself. And I wonder if this isn't true of most of the disputes which separate us, which cause violence, which have so characterised human history that our true nobility is lost sight of, and it is this larger truth that Christianity , and human kind generally, is really about. It's a form of transcendence and its beginnings must needs be small - the enlarging of ones own individual heart to encompass the reality of the other, to step back for once from ones personal fears and prejudices, to give room for the possibility of something new. It's essentially a creative move, allowing space for one another's true image to emerge. This can only be done through encounter and letting the rules take care of themselves, rediscovering our potential to be masters or mistresses of the Sabbath, allowing God or grace or mercy or love to be at play in our lives. It's a risky business; it can divide as well as unite. It can end in a cross.

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