

Dear all,

The news this week, other than the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, seems to be filled with ‘that slap’ and its fall-out. For those who have managed to avoid this, it is when the host of that section of the Oscars, Chris Rock, made a joke about Will Smith’s wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, and her lack of hair. Will Smith then went up on stage and slapped Chris Rock. As a result there has been, rightly, condemnation of this, and Will Smith has resigned from the Oscar’s Academy.

What seems to have garnered very little comment is that the presenter set out to use (misuse!) the occasion to purposely humiliate a vulnerable woman in front of an audience of millions. (Jada Pinkett Smith has lost her hair due to a medical condition).

I could say much more, but what has hit home to me, once again, is the place of humour and ‘banter’ and the use of these terms to excuse rudeness and bullying. In fact, if anyone complains, they are often ‘gaslighted’ – made to think that it’s their problem. They haven’t got a sense of humour... you don’t have the right to be offended. Since the 70s, when anything was fair game for comedians, there are certain areas now considered off limits – race, gender, mental capacity, disability and sexuality (LGBTI etc) to name but five. One must be very careful about those staples of “an Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman...”, and angels rightly fear to tread on “a priest, an Imam, and a Rabbi...”

So new targets are found. I’m not talking about, for example, political satire, which attacks the powerful and corrupt (or incompetent). But if you listen to many comics, you might hear as the butt of jokes, the elderly, ‘gingers’, the overweight, those who have lost their hair, or have too much hair...

This week is the Fifth Sunday of Lent, or Passion Sunday. ‘Passion’ comes from the Latin ‘passio’, suffering. Mark describes part of Jesus’ passion in this way: *Then the soldiers led Jesus into the courtyard of the palace... And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.*

Luke takes the story further: *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."... And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"...*

Feel free to work out your own sermon from this point...

The lectionary readings for tomorrow are: Isaiah 43: 16-21; Philippians 3: 4b-14; John 12: 1-8. The Psalm is Psalm 126.

The hymns for the morning service are [CHRIST BE OUR LIGHT - YouTube](#) (the words become clearer later in the clip); [From Heaven You Came \(Servant King - 4vv+refrain\) k \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#); [Graham Kendrick - Meekness and Majesty \(Acoustic Trio Sessions\) - YouTube](#); [Selah - How Deep The Father's Love For Us \[with lyrics\] - YouTube](#); [In Christ Alone \(My Hope Is Found\) - Adrienne Liesching | LYRIC VIDEO - YouTube](#)

Anglican Chant [Psalm 126 "When the Lord Turned Again the Captivity of Sion" - YouTube](#)

Graham Kendrick (again!) [Graham Kendrick - Psalm 126 \(When the Lord brought us back\) from Is Anyone Thirsty \(with lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

And a Messianic Jewish take on the Psalm: [Shir Ha Ma'alot - Song of Ascents \(Ps 126\) - YouTube](#) (Messianic Jews are Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah).

Anthems suggested for the lectionary readings include:

[Introit - "Give me Justice" - YouTube](#) (James MacMillan)

[God So Loved the World - Stainer - Tenebrae conducted by Nigel Short - YouTube](#)

[Richard Nicholson - Consort Anthem: When Jesus sat at meat - YouTube](#)

[Drop, Drop, Slow Tears - Kenneth Leighton - YouTube](#)

[ORLANDO GIBBONS - Drop, Drop, Slow Terars / VOCES8 \(Live\) - YouTube](#)

Of course, there are various versions of 'The Passion'. Arguably the greatest is Bach's St Matthew Passion. I have chosen a version with English subtitles. If you have a spare 2¾ hours! [Matthäus Passion----- St Matthew BWV 244 --- with english subtitles - YouTube](#)

Handel's interpretation of The Passion (a mere 2½ hours!) [Georg Friedrich Händel | Brockes Passion HWV 48 - YouTube](#)

And not for the faint-hearted, one of the masterpieces of 20th Century religious music, [✚ PENDERECKI - Saint Luke Passion ✚ - YouTube](#), but only 1¼ hours long.



Stay safe.

Blessings and love

Mark