

**ACT VI : THE FINAL PASSOVER
DRAWS NEAR
JOHN 11:1 – 12:50**

He whom you love is ill

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair;

her brother Lazarus was ill.

³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.'

⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'

⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 'after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Act VI Scene 1. Jesus hears of the illness of Lazarus

At the conclusion of the previous scene, the narrator told us that Jesus withdrew from Jerusalem, crossed the Jordan river and went to 'the place where John had been baptising earlier' (10:40). Our scene opens there. Someone approaches Jesus and gives him a message. The narrator explains that the message has come from two sisters, Mary and Martha of Bethany, and that it is about their brother Lazarus being ill. Lazarus is described as 'he whom you love' (11:3), and John highlights the friendship which Jesus had with this family when he tells us that Jesus loved Lazarus and his two sisters.

Jesus' response on hearing about Lazarus's illness reminds us of a similar response which he gave in relation to the blind man (9:3). Jesus is once again about to reveal the truth of who God is and how God chooses to act in this world. What is about to happen will also glorify the Son of God. It will reveal the truth of Jesus' claim: 'The Father is in me and I am in the Father' (10:38). It will also, as we will discover later, lead to Jesus' death – the 'hour' of his glory (7:39; 12:23).

John is about to present the last of the signs which express the essence of Jesus' mission in symbolic action and prepare us for what we shall see when we contemplate Jesus on the cross. The prototype sign was at Cana, where we saw God revealed as the bridegroom pouring the wine of joy and love out upon his people. John tells us that there Jesus 'revealed his glory' (2:11).

Different aspects of God's life-giving action were expressed in the healing of the royal official's son (4:54) and of the man by the pool of Beth-zatha (5:1-15). The abundant nourishment given by God who sent his Son to share his own life with us was expressed in the banquet offered by Jesus in the wilderness (6:1-15). Then Jesus gave the life-giving light to the man who had been blind from birth (9:1-7). The sign we are about to witness gathers up the main themes developed so far by John. We will witness Lazarus emerging from the darkness of death (11:43) freed from its bonds (11:44), and given life by Jesus (11:25-26).

Before we listen further to the narrator and watch this episode unfold, a number of comments may be in order. The first is that while this scene fits very neatly in content and language with the rest of the Gospel, and so clearly comes from within John's community, there are indications that it is written by a different author within that community.

Even the way Mary is introduced (11:2) is awkward as the episode to which the narrator refers does not happen till the following chapter. There is also the use of the term 'the Jews' in this scene. We are accustomed to it referring to the Jewish authorities who oppose Jesus. This fits well with its use in verse eight, but from then on the writer uses the expression 'the Jews' to refer, without any implication of hostility, to the people of Judah. Moreover we will be told that they believe things that 'the Jews' quite decidedly rejected in earlier encounters (compare 11:37 with 9:34).

From other Gospels we know that in the last days of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem he stayed at Bethany (Mark 11:11; Matthew 21:17). Mark and Matthew mention a woman anointing him with costly ointment while he was having a meal there at the house of a leper called Simon (Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13). John, as we will see, also mentions a meal at Bethany, though he does not mention the name of the host, only that Lazarus was a guest and that Martha was serving at table. He tells us that it was Mary who performed the anointing (12:3). Luke, without naming the village, mentions Jesus being welcomed into Martha's home and conversing there with her and her sister Mary (Luke 10:38-42). The Beloved Disciple may be giving us a more accurate account from his own memories, yet it is somewhat surprising that Lazarus is not mentioned in the other Gospels. Even here in John, Lazarus remains a mysterious and silent figure. The focus of the scene is not on him but continually on Jesus and the introduction implies that Mary and Martha were better known than their brother.

In the First Testament we find a legend about Elijah restoring to life the son of a widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17:17-24) and a similar legend concerning Elisha and the son of a Shunammite woman (2Kings 4:17-24). In the New Testament the three Synoptic Gospels tell us about Jesus restoring a young girl to life (Mark 5:22-43; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:41-56), and Luke recounts the restoring to life of the only son of a widow from Nain (Luke 7:11-17). In the Acts, Luke tells us of Peter and Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42) and of Paul and Eutyches (Acts 20:9-10).

Limiting our comments here to the episodes concerning Jesus it is impossible to get behind popular reaction and symbolic expression to the nature of the miraculous event which is at the heart of the narratives. We even, for example, find a development between Mark and Matthew in the episode concerning the young girl. In Mark the father says: 'My little daughter is at the point of death' (Mark 5:23), while in Matthew he says: 'My daughter has just died' (Matthew 9:18). In any case the Gospel writers are not interested in raising our hopes that we will be restored to *this* life once we have died. They are demonstrating Jesus' power over death and illustrating Christian faith and hope that after death we, like Jesus, will be raised to a life of eternal communion with God.

Jesus has conquered death

A special problem arises with the narrative concerning Lazarus from the significant role which the writer gives this miracle in the lead up to Jesus' death (see John 11:45-53). Yet he is not even mentioned in the other Gospels. If this sign was as significant as the Gospel of John makes it, the silence of the other Gospels is hard to fathom.

It seems likely that our author has taken an incident from the ministry of Jesus and has placed it in this significant position because of its profound symbolism. How fitting that this should be chosen as the culminating sign, for we see Jesus doing here what he was sent to do. We see him giving life, and because, like a good shepherd, he refuses to abandon those he loves, we see him being condemned to 'lay down his life'(10:11).

Luke introduces Jesus' final days by telling us that the crowd was celebrating because of 'all the deeds of power that they had seen'(Luke 19:37). John, as always, prefers to show us a specific deed of power to highlight more dramatically the significance of what is happening. As he presents the Gospel, it was Jesus' life-giving action that won so many to him and that brought upon him the judgment of his enemies and his death.

This final sign brings to a climax a theme that has been central to John's Gospel from the beginning. In the Prologue we were told: 'In him was life, and the life was the light of all people'(1:4). During the festival of Booths, Jesus declared: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'(8:12). In chapter nine John focused on the aspect of light, showing us Jesus giving sight to a blind man (see also 11:8-10). Now he focuses on the theme of life.

After the scene between Jesus and Nicodemus we heard: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'(3:16). John is presenting Lazarus as a symbol for every loved disciple who believes in Jesus. Lazarus is restored to this mortal life. He will have to die again. What matters to John is that this is a sign of the 'eternal life' offered by Jesus, a life that has no end (see 3:36; 4:14; 4:36).

After the healing of the man by the pool of Beth-zatha, Jesus says: 'Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes' (5:21). Lazarus is an illustration of this truth. The essential truth has already been expressed by Jesus: 'This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day'(6:40). He goes on to say: 'Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes *has* eternal life'(6:47). John recounts the miracle of Lazarus not to raise our hopes that we will be brought back to this mortal life, but to support our trust that we are already enjoying the eternal life of intimacy with Jesus and his Father, and that when we come to physical death we will be raised by Jesus into the life beyond death where our communion in love will continue for ever.

At first the disciples resist the idea of going back to Jerusalem. After all, ‘the Jews’ have just been trying to kill Jesus (see 10:31). Jesus tells them that if they go with him they will not stumble. If they reject the light, they will. This image is picked up by the author of the First Letter of John for whom following Jesus consists mainly in loving other members of the Christian community with Jesus’ love:

Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

– 1John 2:10-11

Jesus is the light of the world (9:4-5; see later 12:35-36) and he comes now to rescue the one he loves from the darkness of what he calls ‘sleep’ (compare Mark 5:39). The disciples fail to grasp the deeper meaning of Jesus’ words. Their misunderstanding enables Jesus to take them and us to a deeper level. Lazarus is dead and Jesus is going to him to ‘awaken him’, ‘so that you may believe’.

Thomas gives expression to the tension that pervades this scene: he expects that this time Jesus is going to die and he expresses his willingness to die with him. He does not seem to realise that what Jesus wants from his disciples is their belief, not their death. At the same time there might be in Thomas’s words an echo of sentiments expressed by Paul: ‘If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him’ (Romans 6:8).

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’

⁸The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’

⁹Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world.

¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’

¹¹After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’

¹²The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’

¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’

¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

21Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.'

23Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

24Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

25Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

27She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Act VI Scene 2. Jesus restores Lazarus to life

We are now outside Bethany. We hear that Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. According to popular understanding, by the fourth day a person's spirit no longer lingers near the body. Martha's opening words to Jesus: 'Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died' express the kind of sentiments that were common among Jesus' disciples in the early years after his death. They lived in expectation of his speedy return and were worried when members of the community died and he had not yet come (see 1Thessalonians 4:13). John intends this scene as reassurance for them.

Martha trusts Jesus, but when he says that her brother will rise again, she understands him to be referring to the last day. We examined the concept of the 'last day' when commenting on John 6:39, and we examined the hopes of certain Jews concerning the resurrection when commenting on John 5:24-30. Martha expresses the standard ideas about life after death that were popular at the time. Her failure to understand the deeper dimensions of what Jesus is saying provides Jesus with the opportunity to proclaim who he is and the mission given him by the Father.

When the Samaritan woman declared her faith in the coming Messiah, Jesus declared: 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you'(4:26). Speaking to the blind man about the Son of Man (linked with the last day - see commentary on 1:51), Jesus declared: 'The one speaking with you is he'(9:37). To Martha he proclaims: 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

Jesus is the Word of God. In him is life and this is his gift to the world (1:4). The Word became flesh in Jesus who was sent by his Father into the world to give us this life: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly'(10:10).

In his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus made it clear that to enjoy this life we need to be ‘born from above’(3:3,7). We need to be ‘born of the Spirit’(3:5,8; see 6:63). The life which he offers is ‘eternal life’(3:15-16). It is not dependent on ‘the flesh’(3:6) and is given to all who believe in Jesus. Jesus spoke again of this life when he offered the woman of Samaria a spring of water that would gush up within her to eternal life (4:14). In Jesus’ dialogue with the Jewish authorities after the healing of the paralysed man, it becomes clear that the life which Jesus is offering neither prevents physical death nor is terminated by it. Those who have died physically but have lived in accordance with the will of God will be raised again to life (5:21,29). Moreover, Jesus is offering the gift of this eternal life now and it can be enjoyed by anyone who believes in him. If we believe we have already ‘passed from death to life’(5:24).

This message is reinforced by Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum. He assures us that he will raise people to life on the last day (6:39,40,44,54), a theme that is repeated here in the conversation between Jesus and Martha. However, the main thrust of his teaching at Capernaum (and it is also repeated here) concerns the present. He is offering himself and his revelation to us so that we will experience *now* the life which he is offering us: ‘Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes *has* eternal life’(6:47). In relation to real life, physical death is not death at all. He tells us that if we draw our life from him and his word we will not die (6:50; see also 8:51; 10:28); we will live forever (6:51,58). If we do not draw our life from him and his word, whatever we call the existence which we experience, it is certainly not life (6:53). Jesus goes on to explain that the life which he has come to give consists in communion with him: ‘You who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in you. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me’(6:57-58). This theme will be developed at length in the last supper discourse.

It is with all this in mind that we return to the dialogue between Jesus and Martha. Jesus is explaining to Martha that even though those who believe in him die physically, just as her brother Lazarus has died, they will continue to live in the intimate communion with God and himself in which real life consists. Physical death cannot take life from those who experience this intimate communion with Jesus, for they will not experience separation from God. Lazarus is physically dead, but he is alive.

Martha responds with the kind of imperfect faith with which we are familiar. Like Andrew she acknowledges Jesus as the Christ (see 1:41). Like Nathanael she acknowledges him as the Son of God (see 1:49). Like the Galilean crowd she acknowledges him as the one coming into the world (see 6:14). Her faith is bound within the limitations of Jewish Messianic expectation. The words might be the same, but this is not yet the faith which John wishes to encourage in those who read his Gospel which he wrote ‘so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’(20:31).

See how he loved him

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, ²⁹'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.'

²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

³⁴He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'³⁵Jesus began to weep.

³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'

³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

When told by her sister that the Teacher is calling her, Mary responds immediately to the call of the Good Shepherd (see 10:3). Her opening words to Jesus are identical with those of her sister (compare 11:32 with 11:21), but the difference in her attitude is highlighted by John. Like the blind man (see 9:38) she kneels at his feet, acknowledging her total trust in him.

At the sight of her weeping and of the weeping of those around her, Jesus 'was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved'. We see him weeping. This is interpreted as an expression of his love for Lazarus. We suspect that there is also something else going on in the depths of Jesus' psyche. He is coming face to face with death.

Some of those present wonder why with so much love he was not able to prevent Lazarus from dying, especially since he has shown that he can give to a blind man the 'light of life' (1:4).

As noted earlier, in John's community many of those who had been enlightened in baptism and had placed their trust in Christ had still succumbed to physical death. How often the community must have wondered why. The point being made throughout this scene is that physical death for those who believe is not death, for it does not separate a believer from God, the source of life, or from the intimate communion which we experience with Jesus and the Father. Jesus is about to give a powerful symbolic sign to illustrate this truth.

Once again we are told that Jesus is ‘greatly disturbed’. One senses an intense compassion here, but also an agony, for he is confronting the powers of darkness. Knowing that his Father hears the cry of distress rising from all who are threatened with the overwhelming darkness of death, Jesus cries out in prayer. His cry, like every other word and action, comes from the depths of his communion with God and is an essential element of his mission of revealing to the world the glory of God, ‘that they may believe that you sent me’. Jesus knows that God, his Father, always hears him.

Earlier Jesus had said: ‘Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live’ (5:25). He calls Lazarus from the tomb and commands those standing by to free him from his bonds. It is the Son who is making Lazarus free. We recall the words of God spoken to his chosen servant:

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

– Isaiah 42:6-7

In a time of favour I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’

– Isaiah 49:8-9

Lazarus is free indeed (8:36). God is giving life to Lazarus through his Son. The darkness cannot overcome Jesus (1:5), nor does it have power over those who share Jesus’ life.

The signs are complete. The reader is invited to join those Jews who ‘believed in him’ (11:45) and, with enlightened eyes, to see Jesus caught up in the great eschatological battle in which he will conquer death and rise to eternal life.

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

³⁹Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.’

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’

⁴¹So they took away the stone.

And Jesus looked upward and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me.

⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’

⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’

⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done.

⁴⁷So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'

⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.'

⁵¹He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, ⁵²and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. ⁵³So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

⁵⁴Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

Act VI Scene 3. The Jewish Council plans to kill Jesus

We are at a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body consisting of the chief priests, elders and scribes. They are concerned with Jesus' growing popularity and are afraid that it will lead to trouble with the Romans. Mark gives a similar picture of growing popular support and official opposition (Mark 11:18), and Matthew mentions a meeting of the Sanhedrin which made plans to have Jesus arrested and killed (Matthew 26:3-5).

Caiaphas, who was high priest that fateful year, made the decisive intervention. It was either Jesus die or the nation be destroyed. John sees in his words an unconscious prophecy, for in the providence of God Jesus did give his life to save his people from destruction – one far worse than any that the Romans could inflict. Referring to the Gentiles who would come to believe in Jesus, John adds: 'and not for the nation only but to gather into one the dispersed children of God'.

There are echoes here of a saying of Jesus recorded by both Mark and Matthew: 'The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). We are soon to hear Jesus say: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself' (12:32), and, in a letter from John's community we read: 'He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' (1John 2:2).

When the prophets spoke of God gathering his dispersed children, they were thinking of the exiled people of Israel:

The Lord will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

– Isaiah 11:12

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the survivors of Israel together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture.

– Micah 2:12 (compare Jeremiah 23:3)

Jesus has already used the same imagery to refer to his universal mission: ‘I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd’(10:16).

The prophets also saw Gentiles streaming towards the holy city and the temple:

Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths’.

– Isaiah 2:3

I will bring to my holy mountain the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, and I will make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

– Isaiah 56:6-7 (see Zechariah 14:16)

Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’.

– Zechariah 8:23

In John’s explanation of the unconscious prophecy made here by the high priest, he speaks of Jesus as dying ‘to gather into one the dispersed children of God’. He is saying something more than gathering *together*. Jews and Gentiles alike are being gathered *into one*, into the communion of love shared by God and the Word (see 1:18). This point has been made often by John and we will find it expressed again in the final words of Jesus’ parting prayer: ‘Father, may the love with which you have loved me be in them, and I in them’(17:26).

This scene is packed with dramatic irony. The one who gives life is condemned to death. The highest council of Judaism in its efforts to defend God’s sanctuary condemn to death the one who is the temple of God. They act so as to stop the whole nation from being destroyed by the pagans, and they are setting in train something that will open up salvation for the nation and for all God’s children who welcome his Word.

For all their plotting, however, we know that they cannot bind the one who has loosed Lazarus (see 10:17-18). Their persistence in rejecting Jesus reminds us of words spoken by Jesus in a parable concerning a man called Lazarus: ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’(Luke 16:31).

⁵⁵Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.

⁵⁶They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?'

⁵⁷Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Act VI Scene 4. The pilgrims discuss Jesus

We are still in Jerusalem. A crowd has gathered in the temple precincts. They are here from all parts to purify themselves in preparation for the feast of Passover (see Numbers 9:10). For the significance of purification see the commentary on 2:6, and for the significance of Passover see the commentary on 2:13. Our mind goes back to the marriage feast of Cana. True purification is possible only if we come to Jesus and welcome the communion of love which he has come to give us. Only with the wine of the Spirit can we 'purify ourselves, just as he is pure' (1John 3:3).

This is the third Passover mentioned by John (see 2:13; 6:4). Note also the expression 'Passover of the Jews'. The text is being written within a community in which all ties with the synagogue have been broken. The people are looking for Jesus and talking about him (compare 7:11-13).

The tension is mounting.

Act VI Scene 5. Mary anoints Jesus

John seems to be placing this event on Saturday evening, at the conclusion of the Sabbath. We are at the beginning of Jesus' final week. John wants us to understand what happens here in the light of Passover (12:1; see 11:55). He does not tell us in whose home the meal is taking place, only that it is in Bethany, where Lazarus had his home (literally, 'where Lazarus was'). From the similarities between his account and that of Mark and Matthew, it would appear that we are in the home of a leper named Simon (Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:6). Lazarus is also a guest and Martha is helping to serve the meal. The one who has been 'raised' to life is enjoying a banquet with Jesus: 'I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me' (Revelation 3:20).

Neither Mark nor Matthew mention the name of the woman who anoints Jesus. John tells us that it is Mary. There are two elements of John's story that are quite strange and neither of them are found in the Synoptic account. Mark and Matthew tell us that the woman anointed Jesus' head with a very precious perfume (Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:7). John tells us that she anointed his *feet* and then proceeded to wipe off the perfumed oil with her hair. The anointing of feet was not a normal procedure at a meal, though it was part of the preparations of a corpse for burial (though see Luke 7:38). One may wipe away tears (see Luke 7:38), but hardly precious perfume. No doubt John was aware of the unusual nature of her actions. He is including them for symbolic reasons. Like the high priest, but in a very different way, she too is making an unconscious prophecy. Jesus' words make it clear that she is foretelling his burial.

Judas is named (see 6:71) and we are told that his concern over what he considered waste was because he was a thief. Verse eight alludes to an injunction of the Law:

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land'.

– Deuteronomy 15:11

Jesus' words to Judas are in no sense discouraging concern for the poor. Burial of the dead is also a work of mercy and it is on this that our attention is being focused here.

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?'

⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

⁷Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

The contrast between the banquet held with friends and the previous scene is striking. While the leaders are plotting to kill Jesus, Mary's gentle action symbolises the presence and care of God for Jesus as he passes through his passion. She is preparing Jesus for burial. Against the prevailing mood of betrayal, theft and political intrigue her loving care ensured that 'the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume'. The perfume of God's providential care for Jesus will permeate the tragic events of Jesus' final week.

Act VI Scene 6. Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem

In the Synoptic Gospels the entrance of Jesus into the city is followed by the clearing of the temple, a scene which John chose to place much earlier (2:13-22). Another difference is that in John's account the reason for the enthusiasm which greets Jesus is the testimony concerning the raising of Lazarus (12:18).

The reaction of this crowd reminds us of the reaction after the multiplication of the loaves when another crowd acclaimed him as the prophet and strove to make him their king (6:15). This crowd too is greeting Jesus as a king. They welcome him with branches of palm as a national liberator (compare 1Maccabees 13:51; 2Maccabees 10:7).

Their chant (12:13) is from Psalm 118:25-26. Hosanna is a triumphant cry confident that the Lord will save. The rest is a blessing in the name of the Lord which greets the pilgrim entering Jerusalem for one of the great feasts. The crowd are greeting Jesus in the hope that he is the answer to this prayer, that the Lord is sending him to them as their Saviour. The words added to the psalm, 'the king of Israel', indicate that they are repeating the misunderstanding of the Galilean crowd at the multiplication of the loaves. There is irony here, for Jesus is the King of Israel – indeed, the king of the whole world, but not in the way they understand.

On the earlier occasion Jesus withdrew (6:15). Here he expresses his rejection of their Messianic expectations by finding a young donkey and sitting on it. John admits that Jesus' disciples did not see the significance of this at the time. They came to understand Jesus' action only after his death and resurrection (12:16; compare 2:22). John expresses this understanding by quoting from the prophet Zechariah (Matthew does the same; see Matthew 21:5):

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! ... Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey ... His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free.

– Zechariah 9:9-11

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!'

¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

¹⁷So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify.

¹⁸It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him.

¹⁹The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'

Jesus is their king, but one who 'shall command peace to the nations', and who, 'because of the blood of my covenant with you, will set your prisoners free'. He is not coming as a national hero or national liberator. He is 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the *world*'(1:29). He is 'the Saviour of the *world*'(4:42). He is coming to give his flesh and to pour out his blood, the blood of the covenant, 'for the life of the *world*'(6:51). We have just heard that Jesus 'was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God'(11:52). Now, as the Pharisees say: 'the world has gone after him'(12:19).

John introduces his quotation from Zechariah with the words: 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion'(12:15). They echo words of the prophet Zephaniah:

I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly ... They will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. Sing aloud, *O daughter Zion*; shout, *O Israel!* Rejoice and exult with all your heart, *O daughter Jerusalem!* ... *The king of Israel*, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: *Do not fear*, *O Zion*; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

– Zephaniah 3:12-19

Jesus is coming as king not to uphold Jewish nationalism but to 'save the lame and gather the outcast'.

The imagery of this scene is found also in the Book of Revelation:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

– Revelation 7:9

Act VI Scene 7. Jesus draws everyone to himself

We have just heard the Pharisees exclaim: ‘Look, the whole world has gone after him’ (12:19). Now, to demonstrate how true this is, some Gentiles express a desire to see Jesus – the first step on the road of faith (1:39). Since it was through the early missionaries that the Gentile world came to Jesus, John portrays these first fruits of the Gentile mission as approaching Jesus indirectly.

Jesus has just rejected the narrow nationalistic hopes of the crowd that welcomed him into Jerusalem so enthusiastically. Now we see him beginning to ‘gather into one the dispersed children of God’ (11:52). Philip goes to Andrew and Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. These men, both with Greek names, were among Jesus’ first disciples (1:40,43) and we met them together at the multiplication of the loaves (6:7-8).

This expression of desire draws forth from Jesus the words for which we have been waiting since the beginning of the Gospel: ‘the hour has come’. On two earlier occasions when an attempt to arrest him failed, John declared that it was because ‘his hour had not yet come’ (7:30; 8:20). At last it has come (compare Mark 14:41).

A connection has already been made between Jesus’ dying and his being a source of life. Jesus told Nicodemus: ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life’ (3:15). He told those attending the synagogue at Capernaum that he would give his flesh for the life of the world (6:51). At the festival of Booths Jesus declared: ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will realise that I am he’ (8:28). Later he spoke of himself as ‘the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep’ (10:11).

Now he declares: ‘the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’. He, the Word of God made flesh, is about to make a complete gift of himself in love even to embracing the cross which others thrust upon him. God will glorify him, because by offering his life in love he will reveal the intimate love that binds him to the Father, and in revealing this communion he is revealing God.

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’

²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

²³Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’

²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

With his characteristically solemn introduction ('Very truly, I tell you'), Jesus takes an example from nature to explain why it is that he is going to lay down his life. It is only through losing its unique single existence in a form of dying that a wheat grain produces its harvest. Likewise, it is only through the gift of his life in love that Jesus will accomplish his Father's purpose in sending him into the world.

It is the love with which Jesus gave his life that broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile and enabled them to come together into community to form 'one flock' with 'one shepherd' (10:16). Addressing the Gentiles, Paul wrote:

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

– Ephesians 2:13-16

Jesus seems to have been referring to the Gentiles when he spoke of another seed, the tiny mustard seed, which 'when it is sown' grows into a shrub that is large enough for the birds to make their nests in its branches (Mark 4:31-32).

John uses a typically stark Semitic contrast between love and hate to indicate the need to choose what kind of life we want to live. If we *love* the kind of life that this world offers, in the sense that it is this present physical existence which matters most to us, we will end up destroying ourselves and losing real life, the life that comes from communion with God and is experienced through intimacy with Jesus. This is the life that Jesus calls 'eternal' and which we can experience only by being 'born from above' (3:3).

If, on the other hand, we *hate* the kind of life which the world offers; if, in other words, we recognise that there are higher values and we are willing to sacrifice this physical existence when to hold on to it would get in the way of the kind of life that comes 'from above', the 'eternal life' that God shares with Jesus and that Jesus has come to give us abundantly (10:10), then we will keep this real life. Jesus is not going to hold on to this life when love calls him to let it go. It must be the same for his disciples.

Jesus does not use the term disciples here. Rather, he speaks of his *servants* (Greek: *diakonos*). In the New Testament a *diakonos* ('servant') is a person who carries out a ministry commissioned by God. The serving always is in terms of serving God, doing God's will. We might reflect on the following statement from Saint Paul:

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God
who activates all of them in everyone.
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

– 1Corinthians 12:4-7

Paul is speaking of the Christian life. From the Spirit of God we each receive all that we have as a gift of grace. From the risen Christ we are commissioned to use the gifts we have to carry on his mission in the world: to 'serve' God in relating to others in love. We should not be despondent if our gifts seem so poor, for it is God, who creates out of nothing, who 'by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine' (Ephesians 3:20).

Jesus is saying that if we want to serve him, we must follow him in doing his Father's will. We, too, are to find our food in carrying out the will of the one who draws us to Jesus and from our communion with Jesus sends us to the world (4:34). We, too, are to learn to 'always do what is pleasing to God' (8:29). If we follow Jesus to his death, if we are not scandalised by the cross, we will experience the intimacy which he was sent from God to share with us: 'Where I am, there will my servant be'. God will honour us by sharing with us the intimacy which he shares with his Son. We will also share Jesus' life-giving and so his suffering. Mark records a similar statement by Jesus: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' (Mark 8:34).

My soul is troubled

27 Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from [out of, through] this hour”? No [But], it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

28 Father, glorify your name.’

Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’

30 Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’

33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Through experiencing a special intimacy with Jesus and through years of personal and communal reflection upon this experience, the Beloved Disciple came to a faith-understanding of who Jesus truly is. The aim of John’s Gospel is to portray this Jesus for us. For the most part he is not interested in attempting a psychological penetration of Jesus’ human psyche with a view to understanding or portraying what his feelings or thoughts were, how Jesus felt about himself or about others, or how he came to terms with his situation.

Being like us in everything but sin, Jesus would have experienced the human feelings and reactions that were appropriate to one so sensitive, so innocent, so wholly obedient and so aware of the human condition in himself and in others. Here in this passage John gives us one of his rare insights into what facing rejection meant to Jesus: ‘Now my soul is troubled’. John does not present the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane the way the other Gospel writers do, but he gives us the equivalent here.

The NRSV translation has interpreted Jesus’ prayer as expressing much the same sentiments as we find, for example, in Mark where Jesus prays: ‘remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want’ (Mark 14:34-36). In John’s text, however, Jesus is not praying to be saved from having to go through the hour. Rather he is praying that the hour will, indeed, achieve its goal. Though his soul is troubled he trusts that God will take him through the ordeal and will save him by giving him the fullness of life and the ‘glory which I had in your presence before the world began’ (17:5). He is praying to be saved *through* his death not *from* it.

I think that the NRSV is mistaken in translating the first word of the following phrase by ‘No’. The Greek conjunction expresses a contrasting feeling, not a contradictory one. With all his heart Jesus wants his Father to be revealed to the world: ‘Father, glorify your name’. All Jesus wants is his Father’s glory. The passion that stirs the heart of Jesus is to bring all God’s children to experience the liberation that follows on their coming to see who God really is and respond to this revelation, for, as he has already said: ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (10:10). This longing of Jesus has come down to us also in Jesus’ prayer: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’ (Matthew 6:9).

For the first and only time John gives us, in a typically biblical and dramatic way, God's response to Jesus' prayer: 'I have glorified my name and I will glorify it again'. God has glorified his name in that the love communion between himself and Jesus – a love communion in which God wills everyone to share – has been revealed in the signs which God has worked through Jesus. God will glorify his name again by gracing Jesus to be faithful unto death. When Jesus is lifted up in faithful love all God's scattered children will be attracted to Jesus and hence drawn to share in the love that unites Jesus and his Father.

God will be glorified and his Son with him every time a disciple says Yes to grace and accepts the life that Jesus is now offering, for, in the words of Irenaeus: 'The glory of God is a human being who is fully alive'.

We find examples of God responding in the Synoptic accounts of the Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:11) and his Transfiguration (Mark 9:7). Here the crowd think that they are hearing thunder or perhaps an angel for they cannot discern what comes 'from above'. John reminds us that Jesus needs no confirmation of the communion of love which he has with his Father (compare 11:42). God spoke for the sake of the crowd. Unless people realise that Jesus is the Son of God and that he is on a mission from his Father, they will never succeed in grasping his revelation.

'*Now* my soul is troubled' is followed by another *now*: '*Now* is the judgment of this world'. We do not have to await the ending of this world or of time and space as we know it to discover God's judgment. Jesus is 'the light of the world'(8:12; 9:5), the 'true light who enlightens everyone'(1:9). We stand judged by our response to this light. If we 'hate the light and do not come to the light'(3:20) and if we oppose the light, we will remain in darkness, but the light will continue to shine, for 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it'(1:5). Furthermore, through Jesus' love given unto death the power of darkness is itself overthrown and 'the ruler of this world is driven out'. Evil can have no power over those who remain in communion with Jesus.

And what is Jesus' response to the darkness that is closing in on him? When he is lifted up on the cross his arms will be stretched out in a gesture of welcome. He will draw everyone to himself without exception, including those who reject him. It is we who judge ourselves by our responses (see 3:14-21). Jesus' part is only to love: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you'(Jeremiah 31:3). And there is more to Jesus' being lifted up than his being raised on the cross. In this very act his Father is lifting Jesus up to himself in love: 'See, my servant shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high'(Isaiah 52:13).

Jesus' words reveal that 'the kind of death that he was to die' is a death that will reveal the glory of God and that will 'gather into one the dispersed children of God'(11:52).

The scene began with some Gentiles expressing to Jesus' disciples their desire to see Jesus. They are being told that to do this they will have to look upon him crucified, for it is there that they will see God's love revealed and be attracted to share in Jesus' life.

³⁴The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?'

³⁵Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.'

³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

The crowd challenges Jesus. The Messiah was one who would bring life. His throne would never fail. 'His line shall continue forever, and his throne endure before me like the sun'(Psalm 89:36). What is all this talk about 'the kind of death he was to die'? 'Who is this Son of Man?'

The question being posed here was one that John's community had to face constantly, for, as Paul writes: 'we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles'(1Corinthians 1:23). John does not attempt to answer the question here. Instead Jesus invites us to come to him, to watch him and to walk with him. Only thus can we come to know the wisdom of the cross. We are invited to be 'children of light and children of the day'(1Thessalonians 5:5; see Ephesians 5:8).

The crowd is unwilling to journey in the light and so 'Jesus departed and hid from them'. 'He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him'(1:11). The light goes and they are engulfed in darkness. We are reminded of a reflection found in one of the Letters coming from John's community: 'Whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness'(1John 2:11).

Act VI Scene 8. Conclusion to Jesus' public ministry

Jesus is standing alone centre stage, his figure radiating light. He is silent. The narrator is giving a summary of key themes in Jesus' ministry. We have been watching with wonder the signs selected to illustrate the ways in which Jesus has revealed God. We have been listening to Jesus' word as he instructs us as to the deeper meaning of what we have been observing. A large question remains. We have been watching Jesus coming to his own, yet 'his own people did not accept him' (1:11). Why? How is it that people could resist such love? John is asking the question about Jesus' contemporaries. We are being challenged to ask the same question about ourselves: how fully have we embraced Jesus? How closely are we following him?

John's opening comment echoes the words of Deuteronomy:

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt ... the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.

– Deuteronomy 29:2-4

'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (1:17). People failed to listen to the law. Why have they failed to listen to the one who has revealed grace and truth? In an attempt to throw some light on the amazing fact of this rejection of Jesus, John turns first to a poem which reflects on the people's rejection of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53:1). The pattern is continuing. Jesus, the suffering servant of the Lord, is experiencing a rejection similar to that of the prophet of the Exile.

³⁷Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.

³⁸This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'

³⁹And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, ⁴⁰He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.'

⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him.

⁴²Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue;

⁴³for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

John then turns to a text from Isaiah [Isaiah 6:10] in which the prophet is warned that his words will, to a large extent, fall on deaf ears. God was sending him to bring about a change in people's lives, but his words would fail to penetrate their hardened hearts, and though God wanted to heal them through the ministry of his servant, this would not happen because they rejected him. John sees the same pattern being repeated in the life of Jesus.

The other Gospel writers also go to this text in an attempt to make some sense of the rejection of Jesus by his contemporaries (see Mark 4:12; Matthew 13:13-15; Luke 8:10). Luke finishes his account of Paul's ministry by quoting the same text (see Acts 28:26-27).

If we were to take Isaiah's text, or for that matter John's use of it, out of context, it could sound as though the authors were adopting some kind of determinism. They might seem to be saying that people failed to listen to God's word because God organised it that way. From all that we have read so far in John (and it is no different for Isaiah) it is clear that God is doing everything to get people to listen and to change their attitudes and behaviour. That they reject him is their own choice and they are, to varying degrees, responsible for their response.

John does not quote Isaiah to contradict personal and communal responsibility. Rather he is attempting to look at things from a higher viewpoint. The fact is that people did reject Jesus. There must be some way in which this rejection comes within the ambit of divine providence. It is this problem that engages Paul in a more prolonged treatment which can be found in his Letter to the Romans chapters nine to eleven.

Our scientific education has trained us to begin with the known and from that base to attempt to penetrate the unknown step by step. We begin with what we know of the human condition and approach the relationship between human freedom and divine providence from there. We remain open to the wonder of revelation and we remain conscious of the limits of human reasoning, but we also know that truth does not contradict itself. While reality transcends reason, it does not contradict it.

As regards prophecy we understand that what Isaiah said was directed first and foremost to his own experience. He was not looking in a crystal ball and somehow foreseeing Jesus. We do not regard it as valid to point to Isaiah's words and then to look at Jesus and say: 'There! What Isaiah saw in his prophetic vision is being fulfilled in Jesus, with the result that Isaiah is proved right by what happened to Jesus'. Rather we see John looking at what happened to Jesus and then searching the Scriptures for words that express a similar rejection. He finds it in Isaiah which he quotes to show that what happened to Jesus is not a one-off situation. There are precedents for it in the Scriptures. Jesus in this and in other ways is not only consistent with what we find in the history of God's dealings with his people, but he brings it all to a certain fullness. He is like the flower that emerges from a plant. By looking at him we can see the flowering of the life, the energy and the spirituality of Israel. He transcends all that has gone before but he is consistent with it and brings it to fulfilment. We cannot see Jesus by reading Isaiah and looking forward. But when we see Jesus we can look back at Isaiah and the other prophets and see him fulfilling the truth which they saw when they looked, under the Spirit's guidance, at their own world.

John quotes from the scroll of Isaiah to show that what happened to Jesus was something that had also happened to the prophet of the Exile. The people's rejection of the prophet did not put a stop to God's faithful love. Neither will the people's rejection of Jesus, though this does not lessen the tragedy for those too blind to see. Isaiah saw God's glory filling the whole earth (Isaiah 6:1-5). John declares that what he saw is expressed fully in Jesus who, in the hour of his life-giving, love-giving and self-giving death, revealed the unconditional and faithful love (the 'grace and truth') of God. In rejecting Jesus, the religious authorities are rejecting the very tradition which they are claiming to uphold.

When John speaks of those who believed in Jesus but were afraid to say so 'for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue', he has an eye on his own contemporaries, for in the closing decades of the first century this was the price that Jews had to pay for following Jesus (see commentary on 9:22). Let us not forget that, according to Luke, 'a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7), and from John himself we have already seen Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, showing interest in Jesus and his teaching (3:1; 7:50).

John's warning is clear. The leaders who were attracted to Jesus but held back were unwilling to let go the empty approval that they received from their peers. If we want to share in Jesus' life we must want above all 'the glory of God'. This could be translated as in the NRSV as the glory which comes *to us* from God, but this is only a part, and not the main part, of what is meant by 'the glory of God'. Jesus wanted to see God's beauty revealed and for this he was willing to give his life: 'Father, glorify your name' (12:28). If we wish to follow Jesus we must want the same and we must be willing to pay any price to see God known and loved. If our own life, reputation, comfort and security come first, we will never experience the life that comes from above (see 12:25). Nothing must be of more importance to us than to see God known and loved.

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried aloud: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me.

⁴⁵And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

⁴⁶I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.

⁴⁷I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

⁴⁸The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge,

⁴⁹for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak.

⁵⁰And I know that his commandment is eternal life.

What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.'

We have been watching Jesus standing silently before us while John was reflecting on his ministry. Now, to conclude the first part of the Gospel, John gives us a precis of Jesus' teaching. The words are addressed to us all. Jesus did not come to reveal himself. He came to reveal his Father. To believe in him is to believe in his Father. To see him is to see his Father. In listening to Jesus' words we are listening to the Father, for he is God's Word and he speaks only his Father's words. As Jesus said earlier: 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me' (8:28).

Let there be no mistake. Jesus is the light of the world (1:4; 8:12; 9:5). His mission is to enlighten all who are in darkness. If we choose to remain in darkness the fault is ours. Jesus is expressing sentiments which we heard earlier:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

– John 3:16-19

Everything Jesus has said and everything he has done has been in order to draw us to share his intimacy with the Father. He wants to save us by giving us eternal life (5:24; 6:68; 8:51; 10:10). If we reject this life by hearing Jesus' words but failing to act on them, the fault is ours (compare Matthew 7:26; Luke 10:28; James 1:22).

The people of Israel would stand judged by their reception or rejection of Moses' words: 'When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, "Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God; let it remain there as a witness against you"' (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). The words of the final speech of Jesus' public ministry seem to echo the sentiments of Deuteronomy. Those who rejected Jesus claimed to be doing so because of their fidelity to Moses. John's point is that they are simply carrying on the attitude of those ancestors who rejected Moses. As Jesus said on an earlier occasion: 'If you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?' (5:47).

The curtain falls on a tragic note of rejection, but we are encouraged by Jesus reminding us that he is not condemning us: 'I came not to judge the world but to save the world' (12:47). He will remain faithful to his mission and so he will remain faithful to us. While the light is still shining there is still time for us to believe in him and so to walk in the light. But 'the hour has come' (12:23). 'We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work' (9:4). All that remains is for John to take us through that 'hour' in a final invitation to look upon Jesus, to see God's love revealed and to respond to what we see with a decision to open our hearts to the divine intimacy for which we are made, for which we long, and which we are being offered.