

**Cuddesdon Easter School Opening Eucharist**  
*Edward King Chapel, 2022*

*Jeremiah 20:10-13*  
*John 10:31-end*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

20 years ago, almost to the day, I visited Ripon College Cuddesdon on interview as part of a discernment process to see where I might train for ordination were I to be recommended at the selection conference to which I was going in about six or eight weeks. I was recommended, but I'm afraid to admit in this august company that I went to train in the 'other place'. In Cambridge.

I don't know whether the pattern is still the same, but I vividly remember coming here on interview in 2002, and the practice at the time was that the Sunday Eucharist was anticipated on the Thursday night beforehand. And I remember the sermon and the readings: they were those for Passion Sunday, and the gospel was the passage which immediately follows the one that we have just heard. The raising of Lazarus from the dead. That sign, that foreshadowing, that reverse echo of the death and resurrection from the dead of our Lord which we celebrate at every Eucharist, and which we will re-member, re-present, this time next week on Good Friday.

And today's gospel is interesting, because it is sandwiched in between that account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and a verse which bizarrely the liturgical commission, deep in their smoke-filled lair in the dungeons below Church House

Westminster chose to *leave out* from today's gospel reading. And it is really essential for understanding the context.

Today's gospel begins, "the Jews took up stones again to stone him." Now of course we need to be careful, as ever when reading St John in particular, about that use of the catch-all 'the Jews', but why in particular do they take up stones again to stone our Lord? Well, the answer is in the preceding verse. The missing verse. Verse 30 of St John Chapter 10: "Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one'."

We are on the brink of Holy Week. And, layer upon layer, our scripture readings this week have been increasing the sense of mystery, the sense of foreboding, the sense that things are coming to a head. Tomorrow's gospel reading has Jesus 'no longer going about in public' because the ill feeling about him is so profound. Everything is becoming tense. And tonight, as we begin our Easter School, right on the cusp of Holy Week, there is a conversation about who Jesus is, and who we are.

'I and the Father are one', said Christ. 'So they took up stones again to stone him'. And by this time next week it will be more than stones. It will be scourges, and a spear, and a cross. Then as foreshadowed by Lazarus, there will be morning again.

And there is a real opportunity for all of us, over these next five days, to allow our vocations to be marinated in this extraordinary story. As I remember happening to me 20 years ago in this place of formation, learning, and prayer, we have the opportunity to let Holy Week read us. To allow our learning, our exploring, or reflecting on multifaith awareness, on sacramental theology, on mission and ministry, to place our vocations to be God's person into the story of the Passion, and see what God will do with that. To find our ministerial identity amongst the

crowd who will shout ‘hosanna’, who will shout ‘crucify’, who will declare that ‘we have no king but Caesar’, but yet who will somehow find ourselves stumbling bleary-eyed into the garden on the first day of the week clutching the oil of our offering, even though we’re not really sure what we are supposed to do with it, and, thanks to prevenient grace, it turns out to be unnecessary anyway.

You are going to hear enough input over the next five days, and you unlucky lot of sacramental theologians are just about to discover how very fond of my own voice I am, so I’m going to stop very shortly. I just want to offer a couple of thoughts tonight. The closing verses of this gospel I think are really important. In the King James Version we read, ‘and many resorted to Jesus’. That is rather better I think, than the dear old NRSV’s rather utilitarian, ‘many came to him’.

Amidst the rising tension, amidst the plotting and the gathering darkness, ‘many resorted to Jesus’. And so must we. Theological College, theological study, is first and foremost not about multifaith awareness, or mission and ministry, or even the Queen of the subjects: sacramental theology. Theological college, a theological course, is about ‘resorting to Jesus’. It is about being formed, being gently reoriented, turned back around to face God rather than twisting in on ourselves, in Augustine’s language. It is about knowing in which direction we are pointing, and what to do when we get there. I would say that at any time of the year, but this coming week makes it crystal-clear.

How will the studies of this coming week help us resort to Jesus better? More honestly? More fully? Can we connect the dots between our seminars, our reflection day, our worship, our socialising? Can we resort to Jesus?

And then can we get out of the way? They said, “John indeed did no sign, but all the things that John said of this man were true.” There is a sense in which John placards for us the shape of Christian ministry. Always pointing away from himself, always pointing towards the Christ. Everything in this coming week points towards the cross and the tomb. And we who seek to be formed into ministers of the Church of England are called to not get in the way of that pointing towards the cross and tomb, but to be formed into symbols, living sacraments, that point towards inward and spiritual truths that are going to remake our world.

The preacher at that sermon 20 years ago said that the most important words really, for people in formation, in the gospel of the raising Lazarus from the dead is that short verse, “see how he loved him”. The crowd noticed love. I’ve always remembered that. The people resorted to Jesus, and they found love there. I reckon that’s a pretty good definition of formation.

Amen.