

Just keep looking straight ahead. Try to blend in. Keep quiet. Fit in. They'll always smell fear, they'll always jump on weakness, always punish deviance. Don't make any demands. Don't dream it could be different, it never will be. Don't ask for what they've got. Don't let them see you. Don't make them notice. Don't stand out. Don't make waves. Don't, whatever you do, draw attention to yourself.

You know what happens to those who do.

Jesus breaks the rules of the despised. He announces his coming. He stops trying to be invisible, stops trying to fade into the background, stops trying to pretend. He strikes the royal pose and this is not mockery: this is a challenge, a claim. He couldn't be more in your face. It's peaceful, yet deeply satirical- he rides on a donkey, that stalwart beast of slapstick and it doesn't take much to imagine that he's both saying 'I'm the rightful King' and 'the emperor is an ass'. The powers that be don't get the joke, they never do: they just see that their power is threatened- when you laugh at your oppressor, you break their power over you. They don't laugh, but they know they are being mocked. They will do mocking of their own of course, all in good time. A red cloak, a reed sceptre, a crown of thorns, even some low grade sarcasm: get-down-from-the-cross-if-you-can. Real gallows humour is never played for laughs.

The response is always the same for those who get above themselves. The mechanism is always the same when power is threatened. Don't imagine you can tell truth to power: it isn't listening, it really, really doesn't care.

Power is nothing if it is not the power to coerce, the power to compel, the power to crush, the power to stop. Power will always shut up those who speak out. Power will defeat those who challenge it. If you don't quickly get back in line, they'll nail you to the straight and narrow. Might might not be right, but it always gets its way. Possession may well be nine tenths of the law but power is one hundred per cent. So when Jesus steps over the line, power - religious, cultural, political- responds in the way it always has and always will. It quickly snuffs out the spark of challenge before it has the chance to take.

Before sunset on Friday Jesus, tortured to death, will be lying in the ground. No funeral. No obsequies. No eulogies. No mourners. No lying in state. Nobody who's anybody notices. That's the way it always ends for those who step out of line. Power crushes every challenge. That's the way it always ends.

Don't make any demands. Don't dream it could be different. Don't ask for what they've got. Don't let them see you. Don't make them notice. Don't stand out. Don't make waves. Don't draw attention to yourself.

Except, this time, it's different. Because unlike every other time this happens, this is not where it ends.

This time it is different. Because this time, it is the loser who has won.

Of course, the bully boys are still there. The religious, political, cultural, social, economic bully boys are still here two thousand years later, still stoning and beating us, still erasing and suppressing. Countless numbers die, crushed on the cross, their only testimony the compassion their suffering might invoke in others. But time has been called. Power has been told in the only language it understands: you are not going to win.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We must return to Calvary. Our faith always circles back to the Cross.

There are a thousand and one ways, seen and unseen, known and unknown, recognised and unrecognised that each of us can be bully and each of us can be victim, we can be both oppressed and oppressor.

But see, there, on the cross, is Jesus. Never the oppressor, always the oppressed. Never the bully, eternally the victim.

Jesus is the despised and rejected. If we would see Jesus then this is where we must be, this is where we must look, this is where we will see him. In the face of those we would rather not see, in the face of those we exclude and demonise; in the face of those we mock and deride; in the face of those whose cries we ignore and whose God-given self we erase. That is where Jesus is to be found.

So.

Just keep looking them in the eye. Be God's child: don't try to blend in. Cry for justice till justice is done. Demand what is denied you, demand what is yours. Imagine the Kingdom: it is coming. Place your light where it will be seen. Make them take notice.

Jesus is calling time.