It is exactly ten years ago, today, that on 1 April 2005 I set out from the French side of the Pyrenees to walk 500 miles to the medieval city of Santiago de Compostela in north west Spain.

4 weeks and some 400 miles later I arrived in a small place in the Galician countryside where there is a Benedictine monastery that offers beds to pilgrims. I knocked on the door, asking for a bed, and it being Ascension Day, I went, before supper though after a shower, to mass.

There are two things I remember about that service. One was that the monk who was setting up for the mass had to climb a ladder to light the Easter Candle, it was so tall; the other was an eleventh century cross that was processed before the congregation and that we were invited to come forward to kiss.

Being brought up in a Methodist chapel the kissing of gold and jewel encrusted crosses was not something that I was in the habit of doing. However, I had also studied history at university and taken a paper on Anglo-Saxon archaeology, and so the prospect of getting up close and personal with an object that in Britain would be behind glass in the British museum was just too tempting… so I joined the queue – not for devotional reasons but for precisely that which St Augustine condemns in pilgrimages – curiositas.

The problems for me in kissing that cross (that I was fast finding a way to put on one side) were twofold – first a hesitation about devotion to the cross itself – rather than to Jesus (I remember a tirade by the senior tutor at Wesley House when I was a student here about the theology of the Old Rugged Cross and the notion of clinging to it). But, my other problem was that this cross was far from old and rugged – it was gold and bejewelled – far too bling for my Protestant taste – and even on Ascension Day when we think perhaps above all about glory there seemed to me to be something missing, something more humble, something more painful, something more broken, that this cross did not convey.

As I listened to Eamon Duffy on Monday afternoon, I realised more about the context in which such crosses were made, but I realized also that in that moment it was the paradox of the cross that I could not see. The paradox of the crust of blood becoming a precious crust of jewels because in the context of a great monastery made rich by the gifts of pilgrims over the centuries, the gold and the jewels seemed detached from the sheer bloodiness of what God’s identification with human flesh actually meant for Jesus Christ and actually means today in our all too bloody world.

And so when I got to the front of the queue and I kissed the cross it felt like a kind of betrayal of what I knew the cross really to be about, a kind of Judas kiss – if you like - betraying Jesus’ humility and self emptying in favour of wealth and privilege and the love of beautiful old things. Glory of a kind, but emptied of its meaning.

We have talked already this week of the way in which the glory of the cross is revealed not just after the fact, in the resurrection alone, but in the very lifting up of Jesus in crucifixion. The very word, *hupsow* that john uses, itself contains this double meaning – referring both to the way that a cross is physically put up, and to God’s exaltation of the one on it. And so the glory is not separate from the humiliation; rather, the glory shines through the humiliation in a man who meets his unjust death and the mockery and agony that went with it, with compassion even for those who perpetrated it.

And the way in which the glory and the brokenness go together in that paradox of which Eamon Duffy spoke and of which Tom spoke in his encouragement to us to stay with the narrative, is demonstrated right here in this reading we have from John – in the very moment of betrayal when Jesus lets Judas go, knowing full well what Judas is about, Jesus says, ‘*Now* the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in him’.

It is really hard I think for us to make sense of what this glorification is, because our natural instinct is to want vindication in the face of our enemies and to think that the moment of glory will be the moment of victory when the truth comes out and we get our own back… … but paradoxically, the moment of glory is where Jesus meets what is asked of him, which is to let Judas go, not with stoicism and resignation, but with faith and love – the Judas whose feet he has washed; the Judas whom we commands his disciples still to love.

My own access to what this kind of glorification means, in so far as I have any, comes from the Methodist Conference of 2012 at which the decision was made to withdraw Methodist resources from Wesley House and other places, against the tide of informed opinion and against the tide of the speeches in the Conference… and the moment came, in that hall in Plymouth, when I realized that we (and in my mind, sense) was not going to prevail, and that my dream, after 9 months in post, was to be lost, and so I made the decision, on the floor of the Conference to withdraw the motion that Wesley House had compiled as a last ditch attempt because it was clear to me that there was nothing to be gained by flogging a dead horse. And afterwards people said to me that I had earned a reputation as a leader because I had served the Conference by withdrawing a NOM it could not pass and I said, I would rather have had a theological college.

Jesus met what was asked of him in the moment of betrayal, not with stoicism or resignation but with a faith and love and willingness to offer himself to it that, when my moment came, I could not find; though maybe now, some three years on I am beginning to feel my way along the path…

Most of us, I fear, would rather not have to deal with the paradox of glory. We would rather have the wealth and the privilege and the bling and enjoy it – or, if we must be humiliated and betrayed, we would rather have the opportunity to enjoy that, or even better get our own back and be vindicated,

… but the way of the cross - which is the way of life - is found on neither of these paths – it is found in the holding together of what the theologian, Andrew Shanks calls, the pathos of shakenness and the pathos of glory.

Shanks’ point is that too often Christians are into victory without any identification with the shakenness and brokenness of the world; or so identified with suffering that any sense of Christ’s triumph over sin and hell and death gets lost.

And he explains it by saying that a community that sings of God’s victory out of rage and humiliation like the slaves mourning the death of their friend in xxxx’s movie, *Twelve Years a Slave*, is a very different community from one in which those same songs of triumph are sung but by those who live off the backs of the poor; whilst a community in any time or place that only laments and cannot glimpse God’s victory over bitterness and betrayal and self destruction, and cannot celebrate God’s compassion and grace in the midst of it all…

is less than Christian… for to be Christian, says Shanks, requires us to hold together the pathos of shakenness, and the pathos of glory that we see on the cross.

When we are in health and prosperity we need to remember Christ’s identification with the poor and the humiliated; and when we are despised and rejected and the worst has happened, we need to remember Christ’s victory not as a victory over our enemies, but as a costly victory of love.

I have not said anything yet about the passage from Isaiah, yet in many ways the germ of this sermon began there, in the first lines, that address us, I think, as preachers:

*The Lord God has given me
   the tongue of a teacher,\*
that I may know how to sustain
   the weary with a word.*

ON another memorable occasion when I was in college training for ministry, that same senior tutor said to us that whatever bright ideas and themes we had going on in our heads when we were preparing worship, we should always remember that there might be someone in the congregation who was desperate and make sure there was something for *them* – something that could connect the depths of human misery, with the heights of God’s glorious self giving love…

And it has seemed to me that that is true also in pastoral work and in evangelism. We need always to hold together and hold before ourselves and others, the depths of suffering with which God in Christ was willing to identify; *and* the heights of the triumph of love over all that could be thrown at it.

But this is hard for us to preach if we will not allow ourselves to experience the depths of human suffering in whatever ways that suffering comes to us,

*I gave my back to those who struck me,
   and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
   from insult and spitting.*

We need, like Paul, as Morna explained this morning, to be willing not only to preach and pray the passion, but to live it; or to allow Christ to live it within us and that means both opening ourselves to suffering but through all we suffer allowing love to hold onto us even as we weep and cry out in pain…

*9 It is the Lord God who helps me;*

*who will declare me guilty?*

I got to the front of the queue in that monastery in Samos on Ascension Day in 2005, and as I bent down to kiss that cross and feast my eyes upon it I felt that I was betraying something… something I already intuited about the pattern of being in Christ that holds together glory and shakenness,

but as I turned away to go back to my seat, behind me was an elderly nun, supported by another, and she could barely walk for being bent almost double, and as she raised her broken body to kiss that fabulous cross, she gave me a picture of shakenness touched by glory that I have not forgotten - her face, unlike mine, illuminated by love.

This holy week, as we walk with the human Jesus through betrayal and suffering to death, let us pray that God will give us a vision of his glory, the glory as of a Father’s only son, full of grace and truth: washing our feet and commanding us to love one another…

Hence may all our actions flow

Love the proof that Christ we know

Mutual love the token be, Lord

that we belong to Thee.

Love, Thy image, love impart,

stamp it on our face and heart;

only love to us be given

Lord, we ask no other heaven.