



Noli me Tangere by Titian

“Do not hold on to me” Jn 20.15a

The Queen is one of many to have made a connection between our current crisis and WW11. As she spoke to us on Palm Sunday during a global pandemic, she looked back to her very first broadcast in 1940 during which she and her sister spoke to children evacuated from their homes during a world war.

At the outset of that war, all the National Gallery's paintings were sent to Wales and stored safely in a disused slate mine. But during a particularly bleak moment, the gallery's director, Kenneth Clark, decided that one picture a month should be brought back to London and displayed. The first to be requested by the public and to hang in solitary splendour was this one by Titian (left). It would be fascinating to travel back in time and hear what the painting meant to those ten thousand people who, having just lived through the Blitz, chose to go and see it during the February of 1942.

What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?

A weeping woman has just begged a 'gardener' for help in finding Jesus' body. He only needs to use one word in response - "Mary!" - and Titian captures the second afterwards. *Now* she sees him for who he is and reaches out with joy. But "Don't touch me", he says, indicating that because of the cross (look at the various vertical and horizontal lines centre stage), things can never be the same again.

Refraining from touching those we love is part of our response to COVID-19 and many are suggesting that *our* lives will never be the same again, even when the danger lessens and a vaccine is created. But if that feels sad and scary, we need to look at the painting again: the brown earthiness of the world in which Mary kneels contrasts with the green idyll in which Jesus stands, a bright, fresh world fertile with the possibilities of resurrection. A new future dawns in the painting for Mary and for the whole world.

“To believe in the risen Jesus is to trust that the transformational power of God is active in the human world, available and relevant to every situation.”

Rowan Williams

Prayer

Risen Jesus

you call us each by name

and we are yours:

though we cannot touch you,

hold on to us

leading us through loss and lament

to the Easter we long for. Amen