

It was on the Sunday (i)

It was on the Sunday
that he took on the city.

Religious freaks usually appear in the desert
urging folk to come into the open air
and find God through getting back to nature.
God, you see, doesn't live in the city.
He prefers the smell of a garden to that of a gutter.
He likes to see children jumping streams,
not raking through communal rubbish bins.
And far better in his eyes are lovers lounging in the long grass
than snuggling up in a single bed.

The city is for sin.
God doesn't go there.

The Lord is my Shepherd,
not my social worker.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures,
not shrinks' couches.
He leads me besides still waters,
not trickles of urine from a beggar's bladder.
And on the mountains are peace messenger's feet beautiful,
not in the middle of the road.

It was on the Sunday
that he took on the city.

It was on the Monday

It was on the Monday
that religion got in the way.

An outsider would have thought
that it was a pet shop's fire sale.
And the outsider, in some ways,
wouldn't have been far wrong.

Only, it wasn't household pets,
it was pigeons that were being purchased.
And it wasn't a fire sale;
it was a rip-off stall in the holy temple
bartering birds for sacrifice.
And the price was something only the rich could afford.
No discounts to students, pensioners,
disabled types or UB40 card holders.

Then he,
the holiest man on earth,
went through the bizarre bazaar
like a bull in a china shop.
So the doves got liberated
and the pigeon sellers got angry.
And the police went crazy
and the poor people clapped like mad,
because he was making a sign
that God was for everybody,
not just those who could afford him.
He turned the tables on Monday...
The day that religion got in the way.

It was on the Tuesday

It was on the Tuesday
that he gave it to them in the neck.

If you had been there
you would have thought
that a union official was being taken to task
by a group of back bench Tory MPs.
Or that the chairman of a multinational corporation
was being interrogated by left wing activists
posing as shareholders.

They wanted to know why
and they wanted to know how.

They were the respectable men,
the influential men,
the establishment.

The questions they asked
ranged from silly schoolgirl speculations
about whether you would be a bigamist in heaven
if you married twice on earth,
to what was the central rule of civilised behaviour.

They knew the answers already....
or so they thought,
otherwise they would never have asked the questions.

And like most of us
they were looking for an argument
with no intention of a change of heart.

So he flailed them with his tongue...
those who tried to look interested
but never wanted to be committed.

And that was on the Tuesday...
the day when he gave it to them...
to us...
in the neck.

It was on the Wednesday

It was on the Wednesday
that they called him a waster.

The place smelt like the perfume department of a big store.

It was as if somebody had bumped their elbow against a bottle
and sent it crashing to the floor,
setting off the most expensive stink bomb on earth.

But it happened in a house,
not a shop.

And the woman who broke the bottle
was no casual afternoon shopper.
She was the penniless poorest of the poor,
giving away the only precious thing she had.

And he sat still
while she poured the liquid all over his head....
as unnecessary as aftershave
on a full crop of hair and a bearded chin.

And those who smelt it,
and those who saw it,
and those who remembered
that he was against extravagance,
called him a waster.

They forgot
that he also was the poorest of the poor.

And they who had much
and who had given him nothing,
objected to a pauper giving him everything.

Jealousy was in the air
when a poor woman's generosity
became an embarrassment to their tight-fistedness.

That was on the Wednesday
when they called him a waster.

It was on the Thursday

It was on the Thursday
that he became valuable.

He hadn't anything to sell...
not since leaving his hammer and saw three years earlier.
Needless to say,
he could knock together a set of trestles
or hang a couple of shelves at the drop of a hat,
no bother at all.

But he wasn't into making things.
Not now.

He was into...
well...talking, I suppose.
And listening
and healing
and forgiving
and encouraging...
all the things for which there's no pay
and the job centre has no advertisements.

So his work wasn't worth much.
Nor, indeed, was he.
For, not being well dressed
or well connected,
he wouldn't have attracted many ticket holders
had he been put up for raffle.

But he had a novelty value...
like the elephant man or the fat lady
or the midget at the circus.
Put him on a stage and he might be interesting to look at.
Sell him to the circus
with the promise of some tricks
and there could be a silver penny or two
or thirty in it.

It was on the Thursday
that he became valuable.

It was on the Friday

It was on the Friday
that they ended it all.

Of course, they didn't do it one by one.
They weren't brave enough.
All the stones at the one time
or no stones thrown at all.

They did it in the crowds...
in crowds where you can feel safe
and lose yourself
and shout things
you would never shout on your own,
and do things you would never do
if you felt the camera was watching you.

It was a crowd in the church that did it,
and a crowd in the civil service that did it,
and a crowd in the street that did it,
and a crowd on the hill that did it.

And he said nothing.

He took the insults,
the bruises,
the spit on the face,
the thongs on the back'
the curses in the ears.
He took the sight of his friends turning away,
Running away.

And he said nothing.

He let them do their worst
until their worst was done,
as on Friday they ended it all...
and would have finished themselves
had he not cried
'Father, forgive them...'

And began the revolution.

It was on the Saturday

It was on the Saturday
that he was not there.

Those who don't like corpses
can't stay away from graveyards,
unless there's some prohibition to stop them
revisiting the dead end
of their hopes and their dreams.

It's as if they think
that should the voice speak again,
it will speak there
or a sunbeam will dance
or a flower will shoot
and give a sign of misinterpreted life.

But close the cemetery,
or confine, through custom or constraint,
the wailing ones to the house
and it looms larger...
the loss,
the lostness,
the losers.

Men shiver in an upstairs room,
warm though the day is.
Women weep in an uncharmed circle.
Memory is forced on memory.
The mind's eye tries to trace
the profile and the face,
the smile,
the gentle twitching of the nose...
and fails.
And a panic sets in
because it seems he can't be remembered.
Was he ever known?

It was on the Saturday
that he was not there.

It was on the Sunday (ii)

It was on the Sunday
that he pulled the corn.

They arrived with flowers,
shuffling through the dawn
as the dawn snuffed out
the last candles of night.
Their faces betrayed their belief
that yesterday would always be better
than tomorrow,
despite what he said.
He would not say it again,
so why bother to believe him on that score?

And the flowers,
they too were silent witnesses to disbelief.
Like the grass,
they were cut to be dried to death,
cut off from the root,
the bulb, the source of life.
He was the flower they cherished,
the flower now perished
whose fate the lilies of the field,
now tight in hand,
would re-enact.

So when they passed the crouched figure
at the edge of the road,
they thought little of him,
scarcely seeing his form through their tears.
Had they looked even a little,
they would have seen a man
letting grain fall through his fingers,
dropping to the earth
to die and yet to rise again.
It was on the Sunday
that he pulled the corn.