

THE LAST SCENE

Many years ago I worked in a big building with a man called (by everyone in my office) Big Davey.

The building was the Headquarters of Strathclyde Police.

I was working in the Fingerprints Dept and Big Davey was known to other people as Sir David McNee, the Chief Constable.

Now Big Davey was a bit like God.

He was always a few floors above you in the building.

He was completely in charge of everything.

He was near - and you never saw him.

In two and a half years of working in the same place I never saw him.

Although I once saw his hand....

One day we came into work and there was a buzz about the place. A message had been delivered from on high.

Big Davey's Coming!

That was it. Apparently some Japanese Police were visiting and Sir David McNee was going to show them round the place.

As a result of this we couldn't get on with our normal work. We had to leave that while we all grabbed dusters and started polishing madly. Never mind that there had been a team of cleaners in through the night already.

Big Davey's coming...

Someone asked if it wouldn't be an idea if we just got on with our normal work when he came round, especially as the office was perfectly clean, but apparently that was too sensible.

And when he got to our office we were told we would have to stand at our desks like soldiers having a barrack inspection.

All day long we slaved away dusting - the most dust free environment ever.

And as soon as we had finished dusting everywhere, we were ordered to do it all again.

It seemed as if he was never going to show. There was someone posted at the door as lookout, peering down the corridor, to give us the sign, but it never seemed to come.

Then really late in the afternoon the cry went up, "*Big Davey's Coming!*"

We all stood to silent attention as we heard the footsteps of Big Davey and the Japanese cops getting louder as they approached the door.

It was the big moment.

And then the door half opened and Big Davey's hand appeared, making a sweeping gesture.

"...and this is Fingerprints", he proclaimed quite loudly, before shutting the door and marching off again.

He didn't even come in. The Japanese inspectors didn't even see in.

And our Fingerprint bosses looked at us and barked, *"Right get to work now. You've a whole day's work to catch up on. Move it everybody!"*

He didn't even come in! But I did see his hand - a wee bit, anyway.

It's a small step to move from "Big Davey's Coming" to "Jesus is coming – look busy!"

Obviously this is a joke usually perpetrated on people of faith by people who don't have faith.

But as you can see the church can sometimes make use of a joke that seems to be mocking them.

What's the message here?

The message is this: imagine Jesus appeared right now. This could mean trouble for us.

When we meet up with Jesus we better be seen as good - otherwise we are in deep doodoo.

When Jesus comes back he's gonna be on our case this time!

Things are going to be different this time!

When Jesus comes back.....

Well Jesus did come back already.

After he was crucified he came back.

And now he had the chance to set things right and to extract revenge on all who had wronged him.

Think even of his friends... did Jesus coming back not have any sense of dread or foreboding for them?

After all, they had denied him, betrayed him, ran off and left him in his hour of need.

And now that Jesus lives in the risen power of the resurrection, he could show the world another side to his character.

But instead, he makes for his old friends, the sulking, coward, fickle bunch of so-called 'friends' and he offers them forgiveness and a new start.

Despite what they have done, there are no recriminations, no lectures, no punishment, no 'I told you so', no revenge.

You couldn't make it up. I mean that really.

If we were writing the story we wouldn't make that up.

I guess because this is all written down for us in our Bibles we are used to hearing it.

But one of the great emotions of Easter is one we perhaps downplay – surprise. Surprise not just related to the obvious thing – the resurrection itself (!), but surprise and astonishment as to what Jesus did next, and how he treated those who tried to destroy him and how he treated those who let him down.

Lets pause for a second here while I speak to Mr Goldwyn Mayer of 20th Century Fox.

Hello Mr Goldwyn Mayer, I've got a pitch for a film.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: Okay. Lets hear it!

It's about a guy called Jesus. He grows up poor – a kind of peasant.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: I can see it now – he works his way up to become rich and famous....

Er. Not exactly. He tells people about God and how to live. He's a really great man - a friend to the poor but some of the rich and powerful are against him.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: So he's a Marxist?

Well, not really...

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: A bit like Robin Hood then?

Well, a bit.... Anyway he is a good man, commits no crime but his enemies have him arrested unfairly and he's sentenced to death. He's thrown into a cell to await execution.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: And then his supporters come and bust him out of there?

Actually no. He is publicly crucified. He is put to death.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: And that's your great story?..... That's it?!..... What a terrible ending....

No Sir. It's not the end. Three days later God brings him back to life.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: Sorry...what did you say there?

Jesus is alive once more. It's wonderful!

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: That's impossible. Wait a minute.... this must be a fantasy story..... I like it. I like it!

You really like it, Mr Goldwyn Mayer?

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: Yes I do. So, now, to the ending....

The ending?

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: Yeah, now that he's alive again Jesus can get those guys. The big final scene.. Jesus can get them now.

All those people who were against him. All those people who hated him. All those people who organised his death. And these so called friends who betrayed him.

*We can make a great ending of this. How **did** he kill them anyway?*

Well he didn't actually kill them.

*Mr Goldwyn Mayer: So what **did** he do to them?*

Well he didn't do anything to anyone except to his friends. He forgave them and told them to spread his message of love around the world.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: You are telling me this Jesus guy doesn't take revenge?

No.

Mr Goldwyn Mayer: Get out of here. That's not gonna make a film in my book. The story was okay up till the end. That ending spoils everything. Your Jesus character just doesn't make any sense.

It's easy to argue a case for Jesus taking revenge on those who had wronged him. It *would* make sense, and would give us a nice battle scene with which to end the tale.

But Jesus doesn't do that. With the world at his mercy, Jesus chooses again to show nothing but love.

And that's a surprise that we who are followers of Jesus need to get our heads around.

Jesus shows us better than anyone or anything else what God is really like. And the reason why Jesus' way was non-violent is because God is non-violent.

Yes there are wars to be fought and battles still to be won. Wars against ignorance, selfishness, inequality, poverty, discrimination. But wars like these are not fought by killing, maiming and terrorising people.

Non-violence changes the world.

Non-violence does not mean (as I wondered earlier), that we let bullies do what they want, or that we act as doormats for the rest of the world.

If someone starts attacking your wife or children do you just stand back and let them get on with it?

If people are kicking a disabled person do you walk right past?

If you are a wife who is regularly being beaten up by your husband, do you just stay in that situation and keep quiet about the abuse?

If there is a crazed madman running round the streets with a gun do you refuse to try to restrain him?

No (!) is the clear answer to all of these questions. Non-violence does not mean non-action.

Did Jesus turn a blind eye to bullies?
Did he refuse to speak up for those being mistreated?
Did he do nothing in the face of injustice?
We know that's not true.

This Easter we've been thinking again about Jesus' dramatic last week in the city of Jerusalem.

He was hardly there before one of the most dramatic moments of his life and work occurred – the clearing out of the Temple.

Jesus acted decisively when he saw that the Temple for prayer had been turned into a money-making racket.
 He scattered the animals.
 He overturned the tables of the money-changers.
 He herded those who were exploiting the poor out of the Temple area.

He sure went into action!
 He didn't look away.
 He didn't shrug his shoulders.
 He didn't do nothing.

But no one was killed by his actions.
 No one was hurt by what he did.
 He acted non-violently.
 But that non-violent action made a huge impact.

The great civil rights campaign in the United States headed by Martin Luther King Jr was successful because of its determination to act in peaceful non-violent ways.
 Lets give the final word to MLK...

*"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, creating the very thing it seeks to destroy.
 Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.
 Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth.
 Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate.
 In fact, violence merely increases hate....
 Returning violence for violence multiplies violence,
 adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.
 Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
 Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

John 20:19-29

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