14 March: Arrest him! (John ch 7 and 8)

The religious leaders were so furious with Jesus that they made plans to arrest him when he came to Jerusalem. They expected that he would come to the city for the special celebration, called the 'Festival of Booths or Tabernacles' (tents). Every year (even today) for 7 days Jewish families build tents out of leafy branches and live in them to remind themselves how God has taken care of them right from the days they lived in the wilderness in tents. I Jesus' day everybody tried to go to Jerusalem to take part in the celebrations there.

Jesus' brothers (who didn't realise that he was God's son as well as Mary's son) teased Jesus and encouraged him to go to the Festival and let everyone know that he was the Messiah – the chosen messenger of God. But Jesus knew that if he did this, he might be arrested. Yet God had shown him that it wasn't the right time for this yet as there were still people he needed to heal and to teach before he allowed himself to be captured and punished. So instead of going to the city in the crowd, Jesus and his disciples sort of sneaked into Jerusalem quietly.

Meanwhile Jesus was the main topic of conversation in Jerusalem. Some thought he was definitely the Messiah; others weren't so sure. Then after 3 or 4 days of the Festival, the news went round like wildfire: Jesus was teaching in the temple. He told the crowd that the leaders were out to kill him. Some of the people thought he was mad to suggest this! But it was true! Even as he was speaking members of the special temple police guard were in the crowd looking for a chance to grab him. But God knew this was not the right time and he didn't let the arrest happen. The police went back to the Pharisees and the chief priests empty–handed.

The leaders were furious! "Why didn't you arrest him" they asked. Back came the answer: "No one has ever talked such sense before." That wasn't what the Pharisees wanted to hear! They mocked the police guard: "Oh, do you also want to follow him? We know the law better than the ignorant people out there, better than you do. Let us be the experts – what he is teaching is rubbish! God will punish the people for listening to him! Go and arrest him at once!"

But it was too late. The crowd was so thrilled by Jesus' teaching that they would have stuck up for him and chased them away.

Jesus also had a narrow escape at another festival when some of the leaders and some of the ordinary people accused Jesus of blaspheming. This means that they thought he was not respecting God. Anyone who did that, according to the Jewish law, had to be stoned to death. The people came armed with stones, but it still wasn't the right moment for him to be arrested. Somehow Jesus just disappeared out of the crowd. Maybe he escaped in the chaos. Maybe it was getting dark and they didn't see him and the disciples sneak away in the shadows. Maybe it was a miracle. We don't know! But we do know that once again God protected him and that attempt also failed.

The fact that Jesus escaped didn't mean that he wasn't going to die. But God was in control of the timing. His timing is always perfect. Jesus trusted God's timing.

But we aren't so good about that. We complain when things don't happen when we want them to. We wonder why Uncle Sean has to leave us at this stage. We pray and pray and nothing happens. But God knows things we don't know and he waits for the perfect time – the fullness of time.

Prayer

Dear God: As we hear these stories we realise that your timing was perfect then. We know this hasn't changed. Help us, Oh Father, to trust you more and not to want our own way. Thank you that you always want the best for us.

Readings

Monday: John 7: 1-2
Tuesday: John 7:10-16
Wednesday: John 7:32, 45-49
Thursday: John 8:48-52, 59
Friday: Isaiah 40:28-31