

# Vive La Revolution! (April 2022)

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by Rev Paul Graham

I'm not exactly a "dedicated follower of fashion", as the old song goes. In fact, usually a good indicator of whatever is fashionable is to see what I'm not wearing, doing or following. Take, for example, my usual attire of corduroy trousers; not the *haute couture* of your average on-trend minister of religion. And I don't have a tattoo, which seems to be a requirement for ordained ministry these days.

However, there is one bandwagon that I have happily climbed aboard, and that is the revival of the record player. Partly as it harks back to my childhood when, as a child of the 70s, I remember fondly the joy of playing a 78rpm single at a shudderingly sonorous and soporific 16rpm (we had a record player that old!). Equal fun was had in cranking the knob the other way, and hearing the accelerated strains of records a la Pinky and Perky. Oh, things that you can't do with CDs, let alone easily with MP3s!

But, yes, I have joined the vinyl resurgence, and it was with great happiness that I received my Christmas present of a new record player, complete with counter-balance, pitch control and solid metal platter (there's nothing more satisfyingly nerdy than writing that last sentence, believe me).

And then it comes to the records themselves. I hesitate to say this, but I'm not really that interested in buying new records. Not from new artists, at least. I'm not going that far in my band wagoning. By and large, it's down to price. New records by current artists retail at something to the tune of twice, or even thrice, the price of the CD version. I'm happy for those recordings that are created digitally to be recreated digitally on CD - I don't need the hiss of the record to accompany these modern tracks.

However, I do love an old record. There is something about the joy of the gatefold sleeve that really impresses me! Whether it is an album (or single) from my youth, kept all these years for such a time as this, or rescued from a charity shop at a bargain price, sometimes with the original price tag still showing how much someone somewhere will have paid. And when you can pick up an absolute bargain, it makes it doubly satisfying.

And, in this season of Lent and the run-up to Easter, I have a special quest. One of my Easter traditions, aside from hot cross buns and chocolate eggs, is to spend time on Good Friday with the musical "Jesus Christ Superstar". You can blame my parents for this; it has been a family tradition for as long as I can recall. Whereas recently I have been sitting down to watch one of the filmed interpretations, I am now on the lookout for the double-album of my youth. Featuring many of the voices from both the original West End production and the first filmed version, this is for me so much more than just a record. It's a set of memories of times and places, even of people, long gone. For me, listening to songs like "I don't know how to love him" and "Gethsemane" is more than just an aural experience; it's an emotional one as well.

It's also a spiritual experience, because it is a reminder of the humanity of Jesus as he walked the earth approximately 2,000 years ago, and of the divinity of Jesus as he surrendered to the traitor's kiss and was nailed to cross. In those few songs, we meet Jesus in bread and wine, in the marketplace and temple, in weakness and strength. In words that are for me some of the most powerful committed to music, Jesus says to Simon the Zealot after being encouraged to start violent opposition against the Roman authorities:

*Neither you, Simon,  
Nor the fifty thousand,  
Nor the Romans, nor the Jews,  
Nor Judas, nor the twelve*

*Nor the priests, nor the scribes,  
Nor doomed Jerusalem itself  
Understand what power is,  
Understand what glory is,  
Understand at all,  
Understand at all.\**

In words that seem to transcend the screen or speaker, we are invited to glimpse into the space that Jesus inhabited on earth: all the greatness of the Godhead at his fingertips, and yet limiting himself to the community that he surrounded himself with and the humanity that he embodied. As Judas later sings, Jesus could have been the global superstar in his lifetime, but he left that particular task to his disciples.

For those of us who have followed the Easter story at least from Palm Sunday, we will know that at the Last Supper Jesus reminded the disciples of their history and heritage of the Passover; of the sacrificial lamb that was killed so that their ancestors could find freedom. At the same time, Jesus reframes the story to include all humanity, centred on his imminent crucifixion.

That reminder of old to new, of reframing history to shape not only the present but also the future, is present throughout Jesus' ministry, but finds its strongest impact during those few days; from Thursday evening to Sunday morning, we see how the past freedom is remembered, reformed, reshaped, redeemed and released from a limited number of recipients to an invitation to the whole world.

Just as the records I play remind me of times that I cannot return to, but send me into a future that is yet to come (and the anticipation of further bargain purchases), so too we approach Easter with its reminders of the past traditions, and the hope of the future yet to be written (or sung about). As revolutions go, I think Jesus and his humanity-encompassing, grace-filled, love-fuelled, hope-inspiring, mercy-giving, justice-chasing quest is one bandwagon worth boarding.

*\* Lyrics quoted from "Poor Jerusalem" ("Jesus Christ Superstar" by Tim Rice & Andrew Lloyd-Webber, 1970)*