

Maundy Thursday Reflection 9th April 2020

Today, Maundy Thursday, marks a significant shift in our Holy Week journey. The full horror of the final hours of Jesus life begin to unfold, and even though we know the ultimate joyous outcome, our mood becomes increasingly sombre.

As I have re-read the Gospel passage set for today, John 13 v 1-17 & 31b-35, several words and images keep running through my mind; betrayal, love and service. Therefore, I would like to briefly share my thoughts with you.

Firstly, I am struck by Jesus quiet self-awareness and control over the situation. As the Disciples have gathered in the Upper Room it is clear that he is fully aware of his impending death, and that he quietly accepts this. Even now Jesus primary focus and emotion is love. He is not frantically trying to formulate an escape plan nor rush round saying goodbye to his nearest and dearest. Instead Jesus washes the feet of his friends, setting them a powerful example of humility and loving service, leading to a new commandment to love one another as he has loved them. It is frequently this aspect that we focus upon on this holy day but it is not what God has put upon my heart this year, despite the many such acts being done in response to the Covid 19 emergency here and around the world.

The second image that struck me about the Bible passage was that of cleansing. As Jesus washes the daily dirt and grim from the Disciples feet he is also washing away their past short-comings, the many times they have misinterpreted his message or been full of their own importance. It is as if Jesus is absolving them from their sins so that they will be able to eventually carry on his mission, proclaiming the Gospel with passionate conviction rather than being paralysed with fear, inertia or self-loathing at letting their friend down. We can see this 'absolution' extending to us at our baptism and when we join in the Eucharist. Our liturgy speaks of the Jesus washing away sins through the water of baptism and through his blood shed on the cross. We are thus reassured that our sins are forgiven and that we can move forward with our lives knowing that even if we stumble and fall again we will be never be beyond Jesus loving care.

However, the over-riding word that God has made me return to time and again as I have reflected upon our set Gospel reading for today is 'betrayal'. Our passage begins with the devil inspiring Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus but the knowledge of this does not deter Jesus or alter his resolve. It seems that Jesus sadly but calmly accepted Judas impending actions, lovingly washing his feet also. If we sensed an act of betrayal we would probably be edgy, our movements, conversation and mood on high alert, we would be unlikely to carry on as normal let alone interact with our betrayer in a caring manner. Jesus humility and love formed a barrier that deflected Judas betrayal, Jesus didn't change, his words, actions and emotions remained untainted. What an incredible example to set for his followers! I wonder how often the other Disciples would look back on that part of the 'Last Supper' and ponder how Jesus carried on their final meal together knowing that one of his closest circle would do such a thing.

The actions of Jesus towards Judas are another great teaching and closely linked to the command to love one another. It reminds us that we are called to love our enemies as well as our friends, to serve the stranger as well as those we know well. In a truly Christian community there would be no outcast, no marginalised person or group, all would be treated with the same care and concern. At the moment the coronavirus is bring people together in loving service, with only a few exceptions marring this wondrous out-pouring of communal care. My prayer is, on this Maundy Thursday, that this sense of loving care and concern does not fade once the pandemic crisis has eased nor descend into a scapegoat scenario. I pray that we continue to support each other without blame or recrimination (we tend to be very good after an event to say on how things could have been done better or differently!). As Christians it is part of our witness to the Gospel to follow Jesus example of love and humility towards every member of our communities regardless of how they behave towards us.

As we journey on towards the Cross, may Jesus sacrificial love inspire you, the Holy Spirit protect and strengthen you and the presence of God Almighty comfort you and all whom you know and love. Amen

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