

Maundy Thursday – 2019

Is it possible to succeed without any act of betrayal? The words of the French film director Jean Renoir. Betrayal it seems is all around us. We are betrayed by our elected representatives, by advertising industry, the media, by our employers, by the Church. The Hebrew Scriptures tell of gross betrayal amongst siblings and other family members. The story of the patriarchs is riven with betrayal. The psalmist complains 'Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.' This betrayal of friends is commemorated this evening.

This is the night he was betrayed, St Paul tells us in the passage we heard from his first letter to the Corinthians. This is early scripture, earlier than the gospels, perhaps this was only twenty or so years after the events in Jerusalem. Clearly Paul has been told perhaps from Jerusalem Church about what happened on that fateful night. *For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed.....'*

There are twelve chairs set here before us; representing the twelve disciples. There is a chair for Judas. (Fear not, there are no names on the backs of the chairs like Hollywood)! He was with the twelve, he ate with them, and John tells us that he was with them when Jesus took a towel and washed their feet. Jesus washed Judas' feet.

When the Church in Corinth gathered for their ritual meal clearly it was a time when their divisions were brought into sharp focus. We rather miss that in tonight's reading. Paul says that the intention of Jesus at the Last Supper, in the sharing of bread and wine was meant to focus the daily sharing in love which was the message of the death of Jesus. Those who attended the meal without that love of their fellows were frankly bringing condemnation upon themselves. And yet Jesus washed Judas' feet.

We are told in a number of places that Jesus knew that he would be betrayed and indeed who would betray him. Judas has become infamous, despised his name found its way into our vernacular as a common noun. 'You Judas!' But in a rather strange way Jesus took away the power of the betrayal by the love he showed the twelve in his giving of himself, this is my body, this is my blood and in the washing of their feet, as we say in the Family Service Eucharistic prayer 'teaching one more lesson of love.' Yes, Jesus washed Judas' feet.

So when Jesus gives himself over to the disciples this is my body, this is my blood, when he washes their feet he makes of them guests, debtors even, he makes powerless their betrayals, their desertion; he makes

with them a covenant that cannot be negated by their unfaithfulness. What we need to appreciate is that betrayal lies at the heart of every Eucharist. Now I know that that sounds harsh! None of us come to Church in that mindset. But it's true, but what is equally true is that the power of betrayal has been totally negated.

Before we turn to the altar to prepare ourselves once again to hear these awful words, we bring our gifts and we offer one another peace. Anglican peace greetings have become something of a bun fight it is true! But think carefully about that peace. The risen Jesus came to the frightened, dispirited disciples in that upper room. We can only begin to imagine the tension in that room. The recriminations, the accusations, and the division would have been palpable and Jesus comes into their midst and says peace be with you. When we greet one another we are offering that peace, we assure one another that our betrayals have come to nothing: The peace of *the Lord* be always with you. Let us offer one another a sign of *that peace*. Because Jesus washed Judas' feet.

In gospel of Luke which we have been listening to and studying, immediately after Jesus had spoken those immortal words, after he gave given of himself so completely... the disciples argued about who would be the greatest, quite extraordinary. And of course Peter goes on to deny ever knowing him, and Judas identified him in the garden with a kiss. They could not possibly have understood what was happening. In the Last Supper Jesus made a covenant with them that could not be broken. They were quite simply being drawn very gently into the life of God. Little wonder they couldn't understand. Little wonder that the Corinthians found it difficult to grasp, little wonder we too find it difficult to grasp. It is as scandalous today as it was then. God coming among us, taking the form of a slave, washing our feet, giving completely of himself; and saying do this...in remembrance of me. Washing our feet just as he washed Judas' feet.

In the Eucharist we are drawn into the very life of God, the act of Jesus washing feet, the giving of himself as sacrifice is a sign of the New Covenant, a covenant that binds us to God. Jesus did this to show that we are his friends, to show that we are friends in spite of everything, of God. The Eucharist is *the way* that we enter into God's kingdom; it overcomes the alienation of God, it overcomes our constant attempts to be the greatest, indeed our attempts to be God, something which we call sin. It overcomes all our betrayals and we know this because Jesus washed Judas' feet. Amen.