

Holy Wednesday Reflection - 8 April 2020

Psalm 70

John 13.21-32

Unprecedented is a word we are hearing and using a lot currently in reference to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also a word that I am sure applied to the first Holy Week which we remember as we journey with Jesus through those events that mark his journey to the cross and resurrection.

Right at the beginning of our passage from John, Jesus is troubled in spirit. How familiar does that sound? I am sure that most of us have been troubled in spirit over the last few weeks. Whether that's because we are missing being able to get out and about, missing our family and friends, missing being able to come to church and worship together, missing going to work or continuing with our usual way of life... the list goes on. There are many things for us to be troubled in spirit about right now. Isn't it good to know that Jesus experienced this feeling? Take comfort in knowing that Jesus has felt what you are feeling, not just because he is hearing what you are saying to him, but because he has been there, in body and flesh, and felt it himself. Pause and fully appreciate that Jesus is here alongside you in all this.

One thing that struck me about this passage is the contrasts – there are many. Light and darkness; love and betrayal – and our capacity for both of those; Jesus' complete knowledge of what is going on contrasted with the disciples' lack of understanding; a foretaste of brutal death that leads to glorification. Pause and think about those contrasts, what do they mean to you, how do you feel about them?

Let's explore love and betrayal a bit more. At first glance this passage seems to be all about betrayal. But when we look closer, there is so much about love.

Almost all of us have a story of betrayal of one kind or another, stories of those we respected or loved who have done or said something unimaginable. Maybe many of us also have some stories that we'd rather not admit to, tales of how we have betrayed those who trusted us, or betrayed Jesus. A thoughtless word, a moment of panic, self-preservation, breaching a confidence? The pain is often so deep it is beyond words. Most of us can identify with both Jesus and Judas.

The disciples are completely befuddled by Jesus' declaration that one of them will betray him. They glance around at each other uneasily. Is this because they are thinking – 'Who can that be' – or could it be that they are asking 'Is it me he means?' It's easy for us to apply our post-Easter interpretation to all this and assume that we know what they were thinking. We know that it was Judas - we think we know, or maybe wonder why he did what he did... Yet, the disciples still don't understand that Judas is the one even after Jesus dips the bread, passes it to him and asks him to get on with it quickly.

What about love. What can we learn by being with Jesus in this passage? The immediate example is the intimate picture of Jesus and the disciple whom he loved: 'Leaning back against Jesus, he asked 'Lord, who is it?'. Jesus obviously trusts this disciple and answers his question. But beyond this we see deeper love - love for the one who is known to be future betrayer. Jesus knows that Judas is going to betray him, and yet, earlier in this chapter, he has washed his feet. Even in signifying who his betrayer is Jesus breaks bread and shares it with Judas – a

sign of honouring a favoured guest. This is radical love, love that does not bear a grudge or assign blame.

We have so much to learn from Jesus' behaviour. How do we respond to those who hurt us? What prevents us from acting with dignity, empathy and ultimately forgiveness?

Pause and acknowledge the things around betrayal and love that this has raised for you.

Maybe spend a few minutes focussing on the last verse of the Psalm for today:

But as for me, I am poor and needy;

 come quickly to me, O God.

You are my help and my deliverer;

 LORD, do not delay.

Vulnerable words from the psalmist, but with an underlying confidence in the one true help and deliverer. Thank God, for his unending love, forgiveness and healing for us, even when we hurt others or are hurt by others, even when we betray Jesus himself.