

April 1, 2021

Maundy Thursday

I suspect Jesus knew what was coming on this night. He'd ridden into Jerusalem in a very public way. He'd gotten word to supporters that he would be in town for the Passover, and the supporters had prepared a room for Jesus and the disciples.

Who prepared the room? We don't know. They are not named. But he must have trusted them.

Jesus knew that Jerusalem was a dangerous place for him to be. During Passover, Jews would stream in from all over the surrounding area for the ritual Passover sacrifices at the Temple, and the holy meal. More Jews meant more likelihood of trouble for the Romans, and in this tension, one rabble-rouser could light a big fire.

So Jesus asked people he trusted to provide him and his disciples with a space to eat the ritual meal..

He also trusted his disciples. All of them. They were all his friends. He trusted the brothers: James and John, Peter and Andrew, he trusted Matthew, Judas, Philip, Thomas and Bartholomew, the second James and Thaddeus, and even their own little rabble-rouser: Simon, the zealot. All of them. He trusted them, and he loved them. And even though I'm sure they loved and trusted him in return, each of the twelve would betray him. We think of Judas as being the one who betrayed Jesus, but in truth—every single disciple betrayed him: one by action, most by hiding to save themselves, and some by words, and some by silence. All twelve in their own way betrayed Jesus.

Which is the most wretched kind of betrayal: the kind where we deliberately hurt someone? Or the kind where we remain silent

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and don't come to someone's aid because of fear for our own safety -or worse: because it's easier to remain silent?

Being betrayed by anyone is hard, but being betrayed by someone you trust and love can rip you apart.

Jesus was fully human. He felt the hurt of betrayal, and knew his disciples would feel it too. They would be hurt by his death, and hurt by their knowledge of what actions they had taken, or what actions they didn't take.

So before all the betrayals- Jesus knew he had to make one final, lasting impression on them.

He took a towel, wrapped it around his waist, and washed their feet. Jesus had just been telling them they were to be the light of the world. Now he showed them how.

Love had to be the final word.

It was important to Jesus that his disciples never thought of themselves as greater than anyone else. It was also important that his followers not underestimate their worth, either. Each person's worth is immeasurable to God.

Simon Peter could see Jesus' worth. He-- perhaps like us-- found it more difficult to see his own worth in God's eyes. "But Lord, I can't let you wash my feet. I am not worthy."

"If you cannot see your worth, Peter," Jesus says, "you cannot be part of this movement."

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How will the world see the light of Christ in you if you do not really believe that light shines in you and in everyone you meet? How will they know you are Christ's unless you love as Christ loved?

Jesus made himself vulnerable by loving the 12. When we open our hearts and hands to someone else we risk great hurt. It is natural to want to save ourselves from pain--physical and emotional. It takes great courage to love.

And so love had to be the final word to the disciples. And love has to be the final word for us.

Jesus had to make them understand that he loved them always, even if they faltered and failed him. Love and forgiveness. They go together. He would forgive them all for their betrayal and then he would send them out. I believe he would even have forgiven Judas, but Judas could not forgive himself.

Jesus leaves them with this: "Love one another as I have loved you. This is how the world will know that you are mine." The world needs to see how much we care for everyone, because the world doesn't value love as the final word. This is how you will light the world.

In the next 48 hours, Love will join earth to heaven and heaven to earth for all time. Love will have the final word. Amen.