



## **Judas and Pilate are Included**

**Rev Cate Thorn**

John 18: 1- 19:42

2 April 2021

Today we enter the second day of our three day Passion ritual. Last night after ritual of washing and stripping church of decoration we left in silence into the night - into the darkness of Judas' betrayal.

This morning, in light of new day we gather to listen, to witness to the repercussions of such betrayal. In this place we gather around this labyrinth, an earthed and enacted place of pilgrimage. As we embody our walk with divine presence, wander its pathways, we discover we are our journey.

Last night we enacted a ritual of hand washing. It's more usual to do foot washing to emulate the act of humility, service, and hospitality. Hand washing's associated with Pilate - Matthew has him literally wash his hands of responsibility. We prefer not to ritually re-enact the refusal of justice and abandonment of care.

As we listen, hear again this faith story of the Passion what, or who do we feel drawn to, what catches our attention? Is it the person of Jesus, a desire to be as faithful as he is, or to at least be willing to follow his example? Perhaps that we prefer foot washing to hand washing, that we happily join the merry throng on Palm Sunday yet don't even think to enact the angry mob of Good Friday tells us something.

Could it be that we look to Jesus, God with us, to learn from, to be like him. We look away from characters and events in the story that act against this. We're prepped, if you like, to tell, hear, to receive

this narrative of Jesus' Passion as a story that tells us of God, about God. Perhaps because it's what we expect the Bible does, to tell us about God, to reveal God to us. And it follows the more we understand God the better we can live correctly, be acceptable and accepted. Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian suggests otherwise "The Bible is primarily not [our human] vision of God but God's vision of [us] ... dealing with [humans] and what [God] asks of [us] rather than with the nature of God."

What might it be like to hear the Easter story as a story of what it is to be human, of what God's vision is of us, of what God asks of us, of being known and beloved of God?

Mark's account of the crucifixion is quick and to the point. No shuffling from Caiaphas to Pilate to Herod to Pilate or disciple Peter angst. Mark only needs Pilate. Let's turn to Pilate in today's story, the one we tend to turn from. Pilate sees things for what they are. He's amazed at Jesus' silence in the face of his accusers, for Pilate recognises their motivation is self-interest. Pilate does have power, of a sort, but it's bound by role and tradition to the crowd. Seeking a reprieve for Jesus, Pilate invokes tradition, the annual releasing of a criminal. Yet he's bound to the outcome - Barabbas is released and Jesus sentenced to crucifixion. Pilate had power to act differently. He chose to satisfy the demands of the baying crowd rather than refuse them. Responsibility slid. Somehow it wasn't his fault.

Pilate and Judas, the denier of justice and the betrayer, are both included in this story. God's story of what it is to be human, of what God asks of us. Both are necessary to this story. If Judas and Pilate and the crowd in this narrative we tell, had not acted and spoken as they did, we wouldn't have this story to tell. We might have another divine indwelling of creation story to tell but it wouldn't be this one around which we gather.

It wouldn't be a story which places betrayal, self-interest, mocking denial, refusal to act for justice front and central. A story which includes the worst that we humans can do, one to another and to that which brings us into being, that deep mystery in our heart, at the heart of this event called life.

At Easter and not just at Easter/Holy Week, but all through our journey of faith we're called to follow, encouraged, urged to be and do, to emulate in thought, word and deed the way of Jesus. Yet scripture's woven through with rich stories of holy ones, eccentric, fringe dwelling, irregular and some I suspect quite mad but holy ones. We listen and look for them as if we want to hear as they do, keep close company with the divine as they do. For then we too will enact justice and life will flourish and be celebrated as divine gift. At least we want our idea of the holy blessedness in them. We may not want the cost of it, the outlier status, the no longer fitting into mainstream society bits.

We aspire to live a holy way. We perhaps prefer not to look too closely at the way we are. Or rather we recognise falling short's part of our becoming. We're this now but we'll improve, we'll become more like we're meant to be and less like we are. But always hoping and striving to be what we're not makes us not present now, to the gift of life now, to this moment, of which there'll never be another.

Today in this story is the moment we stop and stare, aghast, heart torn at our participation in putting God to death. The One who shows us who we are and who loves all that this reveals.

This narrative is a narrative of life, of our life, of who we are. It's a narrative of betrayal, abandonment, denial and self-interest. Of fickle crowds whose vehement cries lead to the crucifying of that which brings us to life. These things are in us, we bring this narrative to life. Until, unless we let this be true, consider how they're in us, pay attention to how subtly and thoroughly they thread through us, how can they be unstitched?

This Passion story we tell reveals a curious irony. Human fumbling insistent inconstancy causes Jesus death. Yet through this, because of this Christ, the light of God-with-us is revealed.

We spend a lot of time covering over who we really are, especially our perceived imperfections. Perhaps this blinds us to the potential in being aware of and present to our inconstant, less than perfect selves. It opens us up in honest vulnerability to the One who loves as we are and all that this reveals. Might this narrative of hope be making the startling claim that living transparent to how we are that through our imperfections the living light of God-with-us is revealed? Or as Leonard Cohen puts it "Forget your perfect offering, there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." After all the whole of life's included in this divine narrative we tell.