



Betrayal

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John 13: 1-30

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In this season ripe with ritual action the scriptures we read are likely familiar to us. Heard or read over and over again we can be lulled by their familiarity. Then sometimes something new, something you've not noticed before pops. Maybe it's that you've ears to hear in a different way, puzzling over it opens new ways of understanding, fresh wonderings. Musing as I was on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, reflecting on what to say, I sought to discern the particular nuance of each day, what each had to teach or tell. This night seems to speak of betrayal. How may it be that we hear the scriptures speak to us of betrayal? As I listened this is something of what I heard.

This evening we name as Maundy Thursday, the beginning of the Triduum, the great Passion drama. The Jewish day begins at fall of darkness, this evening, Passover begins. The gospel sets the scene. Passover is upon them, Jesus and those he loved in the world and to the end are gathered. From the outset of this gospel tonight, seeds of disruption are sown: Jesus knew his hour to depart from this world has come, the narrative tells us, not only that but devilish temptation and betrayal is about to unfold.

Unlike the other gospels, the gospel of John tells a Passover account of foot washing, rather than Eucharistic ritual. So it is that the Maundy Thursday ritual most often includes the washing of feet, enacting humility, service. In it we express our desire to be as Jesus - to serve, in humble act offer hospitality in gracious gesture of

washing the feet of our faith filled companions. As Helen tells us "Tonight we recall Jesus' last meal with his friends. He did two things which have irreversible significance for Christians. Wrapped in a towel, he washed the feet of his disciples. By this act, he radically crossed the boundary of privilege and power that divided teacher from student, and invited us to follow his lead."

Tonight in this service we'll enact a ritual of hand washing. According to those who know, handwashing isn't recommended as ritual act in the Passion drama, for it re-enacts the hand dipped bread given to the betrayer, it re-enacts the Pilate washing hands of responsibility for justice. Foot washing by contrast re-enacts Jesus act of service and humility, the God with us exemplar.

In this Passion drama we'd prefer to be as God, we'd prefer to keep our faces turned from the betrayer, from the one whose act denies justice. We distance, deny and refuse, diminish and abhor Judas' and Pilate's part in Jesus death. However, this evening, in this part of the Passion drama, we consider the part of Judas, the one in our faith narrative who betrays.

Let us consider the narrative as it unfolds. From the beginning we're directed to hear this story in a particular way, Jesus is going to die and Judas is going to betray him and yet.

Judas is one of those Jesus loved in the world and to the end. Judas' feet are washed, he's included in the teaching that follows that ends with Jesus saying, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

The narrative continues with the betrayer being unmasked in this way "When Jesus had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he had said this to him. Judas immediately went out. And it was night."

Jesus gives to Judas, Judas receives and Satan enters him, Jesus sends Judas, tells him to go and do.

And we've just heard "Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

Maundy Thursday begins as a story of belonging - to a community of close friends in time, to a community through time who celebrate Passover, a story of inclusion, hospitality, humble service. It ends with betrayal and exclusion.

In this story Judas is cast as the one who betrays - his already beloved belonging in God, his closest companions, himself. By his action Judas excludes himself.

Yet Judas is included, is part of this story of being human before God. Judas is necessary, without Judas there is no crucifixion. In this gospel Jesus names Judas betrayer and sends him to go and do.

As we enact the rituals of the Passion, we look to example of Jesus, as today's gospel urges the disciples do. We avert our gaze from Judas, confused and unknowing, we're just as Judas' fellow disciples were. We prefer not to identify with one whose betrayal causes the death of God with us.

Even though we too are betrayers - of our best selves, of those we love, of our already beloved belonging in God - consistently, knowingly and unknowingly. We avert our gaze from the disruptive, distasteful parts of ourselves. Perhaps because we consider they're not included or acceptable before God, they make us not good enough. We deny their inclusion, their necessity, their part in this narrative that reveals how we know God with us. They're necessary for they are part of who we are, we who are beloved of God.

Are we able to imagine this night that we might be being asked to receive the betrayer, in us, in those who have betrayed us those

we've betrayed, knowingly or unknowingly, as Christ? So that this night we bring all of whom we are, in raw honesty, on this Passion journey on which we betray, deny, abandon, kill that which brings us to life. With outstretched hand we may already wish to reach for those remembered tendrils and wisps of hope - of transformation, new life arising other side of death. But not this night, this night as we depart this place, we depart with Judas and it is night.