



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Wednesday Eucharist with Prayer for Healing Holy Week 8th April 2020

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9, Matthew 26:14-25

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Something that the past few weeks have taught us is that our relationship with our fellow human beings is central to our identity. All the Facetime, live streaming, phone calls and zoom meetings are just about making life bearable, but they will never replace face to face human contact, the smile, the handshake, the kiss, the hug, the real time conversation sharing the same air and space, the looking into another's eyes and not into a screen, the worshipping together in church.

We will of course survive, but this is a pale shadow of the fulness of life. Relationships were hugely important to Jesus too; just as he needed time alone, he also appreciated being with his disciples and followers, sharing fellowship with them, washing feet, breaking bread, conversation and teaching, healing, touching, caring.

Which is why it must have been so crucifying for him to be betrayed by one of his closest companions. Judas was there from the beginning, one of the chosen twelve. He spent three years as one of Jesus's bosom companions. Some of the most plaintive parts of the Bible are Psalms 41 and 55, that prefigure this betrayal; 'even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.' 'It is not enemies who taunt me, I could bear that; but it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend with whom I kept pleasant company'.

But of course, Judas was not the only disciple that betrayed Jesus. Peter did too. After vowing loyalty, he denied knowing Jesus three times, and ran away, leaving him alone.

How do we deal with betrayal, that of others and our own?

Jesus, whilst knowing what Judas was up to, nevertheless washed his feet, included him in the last supper, dipped the bread with him.

In a strange way he accepted the forthcoming betrayal even though it cut him to the quick 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'

The difference, according to the gospels, between Judas and Peter is that Judas panicked and despaired after his betrayal.

If God could leave the way open for someone like St Paul to repent of his murderous persecution of the body of Christ, then surely the way could have been open for Judas.

But he despaired of God's love or forgiveness, and had a sad and sorry end.

Peter, of course, was restored and forgiven during the three fold questioning by the charcoal fire after Jesus' resurrection, and given his commission.

Jesus, though, realistic and challenging, nevertheless leaves the way open for restoration to those who betray him but want to love him.

And that, of course, is all of us. Everyone has their price. 30 silver pieces is equivalent to about £500. That doesn't sound much for betraying your Lord.

But we all have ways in which we betray Jesus, even though he is our dearest companion and friend. Our motives are mixed; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

None of us in Holy Week can sit comfortably in our own virtue. There is something in all of us that have the courage and commitment of Mary and John to stay at the foot of the cross faithfully; there is also something in all of us all that make empty promises, deny, are tempted to take the silver and rid ourselves of this demanding messiah who won't conform to the image of what we think he should be. But some things are without price. Love, forgiveness, truth, humility, humanity, the gracious question 'do you love me?'

When we disappoint ourselves, let us not despair, but throw ourselves at the wounded feet of the servant king and let him raise us to new life.

I end with a poem by Luci Shaw, titled Judas, Peter.

Because we are all
Betrayers, taking
Silver and eating
Body and blood and asking
(guilty) is it I and hearing
Him say yes

it would be simple for us all
to rush out
and hang ourselves
but if we find grace
to cry and wait
after the voice of morning
has crowed in our ears
clearly enough
to break our hearts
he will be there
to ask us each again
do you love me?