

Gospel Reflections for Holy Week (Wednesday 8 April 2020)

John 13: 21– 38

Ever been 'white-anted'? Maybe a friend, family member or work colleague has over time not had your best interests at heart and you have felt like the rug has been ripped away from under you. Perhaps someone has left you out in the breeze when a kind word of support would have made all the difference. Or maybe you have been the one who has been the white ant. Disloyalty is a terrible thing to deal with and can have devastating consequences. In my experience, bitterness and anger loom large when acts of disloyalty are exposed.

Jesus knows all about treachery. Two of his closest friends are about to forsake him in the most dramatic ways. One to betray and the other to deny him (not to mention ten more close friends who were also to abandon him).

I am not sure I have ever noticed the range of emotions that Jesus exhibited. It would seem almost every one of these readings over the past few weeks shows the intense depth of feeling Jesus experienced. Read again verse 21: '*After he said these things, Jesus became **visibly upset**, and then he told them why. "One of you is going to betray me."*'

The looming acts of unfaithfulness of his closest friends is felt deeply by Jesus. How terrible it must have been for him to anticipate; firstly, Judas knowing that his actions will trigger the terrible suffering to come. And then good old impetuous Peter; "*why can't I follow now? I'll lay down my life for you!*" (v 37). We know how that turned out – can we begin to imagine the hurt Jesus felt?

And yet.... sandwiched between the two confrontations with Judas and Peter, with his heart breaking, we read Jesus' amazing words; "*Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.*" (v 34-35) In the midst of the sadness and looming grief that threatened to engulf him, Jesus does what Jesus does and flips it all once again. Instead of allowing the hurt of betrayal to overtake him, he speaks of love. Instead of allowing the bitterness of Peter's denial to poison him, he models love. Instead of avoiding the horror ahead of him... he acts in love.

Jesus was deeply hurt by the acts of his friends and he knows that we too experience such hurt and that we deal it out to others. He understands it because he too felt this kind of hurt so deeply and has experienced its consequences.

As Jesus goes to the cross in the hours ahead, he takes our pain on himself and makes a way for completely different outcomes other than the devastating consequences that lie in wait. He chooses to take all of our sadness, anger, bitterness and guilt and sentence their harmful effects to death. Not that we don't have these feelings but that we have a new way to deal with them when they come our way. His death and resurrection allow us now to '*love one another*' regardless. To love, '*In the same way I have loved*'.

And what of the treacherous pair? Judas chose to let his guilt defeat and consume him. (Matt 27:1-5) Peter, although the path was painful, allowed Jesus' redemptive love for him to work forgiveness and faithfulness in his life once more. (John 21:15-19)

The choice to love in the face of hurt, grief and guilt is no simple thing and yet Jesus knows this is the only way. His choice to love us cost him his life as it was the only way to bring us true healing, freedom and release. In turn, the power of this healing love is also wondrously ours to share with each other. '*Love one another...in the same way I have loved.*'

*Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by **his wounds we are healed.** (Isaiah 53:4-5)*

Blessings to you all as Holy Week continues.

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