

Wednesday in Holy Week: One of You Will Betray Me

²¹ After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus, ²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the money bag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast", or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once."

We have all been let down by someone, sometime. Perhaps we have been let down by family, or by our friends, or by people we looked up to, or by politicians we voted for, or by our employers, the education system... However, when it's an individual, and especially when it's someone close it really hurts. When it's someone you placed your trust in, and shared something of yourself with them, then it's hard. It leaves you with a sour taste in the mouth that won't quite go away. You start asking questions like: "Was our friendship ever genuine? Were they just playing me along to get something? Was I fool to place any trust in them?"

There's no escaping the fact that it is painful. Experiences like that leave us questioning our own judgment and our own decision-making. Could I have done something differently? Could I have seen this coming?

In today's gospel reading from John, we hear about Jesus being let down by Judas. To make matters worse, Jesus isn't just failed by Judas, his friend actually colludes with the authorities in order to facilitate his arrest. It may be that Jesus had seen it coming, although we can't be sure. It may be that he sensed Judas' loyalty waning, that he perceived the discomfort, following the moment Judas had agreed to betray him to his captors. But Judas had also spent 3 years with him, sharing his life, teaching, healing, supporting and challenging. Did those years not count for anything? Had they not made any difference?

It's significant that Jesus gives bread to Judas. To share bread is a sign of hospitality, openness and welcome. It says to the person that they are part of the group, they are connected, and that they should make themselves at home. It's remarkable that Jesus, probably suspecting the worst, shares his bread with Judas. What the Bible describes as Satan entering Judas is perhaps better understood as a reaction against this invitation. Satan means accuser, and at this moment, faced

with the guileless, authentic and costly love of Jesus, it may be that Judas felt accused by his conscience, by what surrounded him, and all he could do was go and carry through what he had started. He could no longer bear to be in the presence of this goodness and hospitality.

We can't know what Judas' motives were. John's gospel seems convinced that it was simply financial and driven by greed. Others have pointed to some circumstantial evidence that Judas was close to the Zealots – the freedom fighters who occasionally carried out guerrilla attacks on their Roman occupiers. They suggest that Judas might have become disillusioned with Jesus, disappointed that he chose not to lead an uprising that would oust their earthly rulers and restore a new kingdom of Israel. Some have suggested that Judas was trying to force Jesus' hand into taking such action. We can't know – all we do know is that he enabled the authorities to find Jesus and it ended in crucifixion for Jesus and suicide for Judas.

But before we demonise Judas, we should remember the others who stayed at the meal. Sooner or later, they would all disappear and hide, leaving the one they claimed to love and follow to his fate. Peter tries to see what is happening, but with a flurry of denials also disappears into the night, and only John is present with the women who attend the crucifixion. They all let him down in the end.

And yet, and yet, it is to this group of misfits and failures that Jesus entrusts these precious moments. It is to these people that he gives a new commandment; it is their feet he washes; it is to their memory that he commits the words "do this in remembrance of me". He chooses to depend on them to tell the story of his life, teachings, miracles, death and resurrection for future ages.

We all let people down. We all let ourselves down. We all let Jesus down. But what he calls his glorification, which is actually his tragic death, is strangely and paradoxically his clearest statement that these failings can be overcome. This is not achieved by self-justification, or by argument, but by love and forgiveness. In the midst of witnessing Judas leaving the room, and knowing the other disciples will eventually leave also, Jesus looks out of the page at us, as if he is saying that nothing, not even betrayal and denial, is stronger than his love for us, and nothing can separate us from that love.