

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 13th Chapter

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

31 Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The Gospel of our Lord.

In the night in which he was betrayed...

Betrayal. Again, we come across a universal human experience. This experience, like grief, can be written large or small. Certainly by jr. high we've all had our trust in a friend betrayed. You're out having pizza with some friends and you have to leave the table for a few minutes. When you get back to the table you realize that something has changed.

People are looking at you differently....and then you realized that someone – a trusted friend of yours - must have said something about you when you were gone. A secret you had shared with only them and now they've shared it with these others. It is a bitter pill to swallow but what do you do?

This is, of course, a smaller example of betrayal, compared to what Jesus went through, but the feeling is the same. I trusted someone. I trusted something. And that trust was broken.

I lose track of all the betrayals that we are experiencing right now. Some are (and have been) experiencing the sense that some in authority, perhaps at the national level, have betrayed the oaths of office they swore to uphold. And this betrayal, in light of COVID19, is costing lives.

Some have experienced the betrayal of their own body. Either because of age or some health issue, they are now isolated. Before this, most of these people were leading active lives, out and about in the community. Now? Stuck at home – perhaps alone, perhaps with people they love, perhaps with people they struggle to get along with – wondering what the future will bring. Wondering if they can avoid this terrible virus that seems to be aimed at them. Wondering if there will be a ventilator for them should they contract it.

Whether the trust we put in our nation's leaders or our health – or whatever or whomever you have put your trust in – was warranted, the feeling is the same. Do you feel foolish that you trusted? Angry? Hurt? Do you want to hit back? (I do!)

What would you do if you knew someone was going to betray you before they did it? What would you do to avoid this terrible feeling and the consequences of that betrayal?

We know that there are some powerbrokers in this world who would do everything in their power to prevent this person from following through on their plans. What would you do?

I know that the Gospel for this service is the foot washing and a new command given by Jesus in John's gospel, but I'm going to reference the other gospels where a meal is shared and given a new meaning as well.

What did Jesus do when he knew Judas was going to betray him?

In John's gospel we are told that Jesus *“got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.”*

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus did the job that the gruntest of the grunt slaves would do. His explanation?

“Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

No job is too mundane, no job is below our paygrade. Your job is now like Jesus’ job, which is to pay attention to and to serve the needs of all.

But before any of this happened, John tells us the following: *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.* There’s a lot going on in that sentence but one thing this make clear is Jesus’ laser focus: loving his own until the very end. The natural tendency of any of us is to turn inward, away from others, when we face life and death (or what feel like life and death) situations. We retreat into our reptilian brains and think in terms of flight, fight or freeze. We lose the capacity to think clearly and to think about anything except our own survival. This is not the mind of Christ. This is not the example that we were given to follow. We are called to love all others the way that Jesus loved us.

In the other gospels we are given a slightly different context. It’s still the night of his betrayal, they’re still in the upper room, they’ve still shared in a meal, but there is no foot washing, no new commandment. Instead, the *meal* is the point. The combination of the accounts of the synoptic gospel writers (with the help of Paul) is where we get The Words of Institution: the Verba. And what we are told in these words is this:

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and gave thanks.

Wait. Stop right there. In the night of his betrayal, he gave **thanks**??? That is literally the last thing I would be doing at that point. I’ve often wondered how we are to read these lines, “In the night in which he was betrayed...” What if we read them *this* way:

“In the night in which **he** was betrayed...” In other words, this is what Jesus did in the dark night of his betrayal; what do **you** do when you are betrayed?

Two other things of note here. First, the one line that is repeated in the Words of Institution is this one: *Do this in remembrance of me.* The Greek word that is translated “remembrance” is a lovely double-negative: anamnesis. It begins with the word “remember” and then an “a” is added to the front, giving us the word that speaks *against* remembering: amnesia. Then *another* “a” is added, turning it into the word that speaks against getting amnesia. This is its literal meaning: do this so that you don’t get amnesia over me...perhaps especially at those times when you have been betrayed, are angry, hurt, freaking out, losing all your ability to think except for your reptilian brain. Remember what Jesus did in the night of his betrayal and give thanks. Why? Because those are just the experiences life throws at us that God is particularly good at working with. When we are stripped down like that and facing situations that drive us to our knees, Jesus always shows up.

In his translation of the Bible, *The Message*, Eugene Peterson does an interesting rendering of Matthew's version of the first Beatitude. The NRSV version is this: *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The *Message* version is this: *"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.* This is most certainly true.

The second thing is that we need to remember that the gospel of John was written 10-20 years after any of the other gospels. Someone once said concerning the Last Supper and the institution of the Lord's Supper is that the synoptic gospels tell us what happens; John's gospel tells us what it means. This is the advantage of having a decade or two more to reflect on the events covered in the Gospels.

There is a gap in tonight's gospel reading. It skips from verse 17 to verse 31b, where Jesus says the following: *"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him."* What we miss out on is what happens right before he says this, which is his saying to Judas, *"Do quickly what you are going to do."* And **right** before Jesus talks about how the Son of Man and God being glorified, we are told that Judas "immediately went out" to betray Jesus.

This is the moment of glory in John's gospel, the very thing that *needed* to take place in order for salvation to take place through his suffering, death and resurrection. The betrayal was a part of God's plan...at least that's what they realized a few decades after the fact.

It is so difficult to recognize the amazing blessings that God is going to work in our lives through things like betrayal. Through things like we're going through now with COVID19. Betrayal and innocent suffering and death are always terrible things. **AND** there are the situations in which God does his very best work.

Someone recently suggested to me that we should give thanks right after we have prayed instead of waiting until we believe the prayer has been answered. Why would we do that, I asked. She told me that in prayer we have entrusted all that we have, all that we are – joyful, thankful, hurt, betrayed, scared, looking for answers – and that the one to whom we have prayed always answers prayers (duh!) and will always give us what is best. And so we thank God even before we believe the prayers have been answered, because they will be. And they will be answered in the right time and in the very best way. I know that's a tough, nearly impossible amount of trust and we're not always going to be able to abide in reality. But that's what it is: reality. God shows up most powerfully in and through the most challenging times.

There's a famous poem, often superimposed over a picture of two sets of footprints in the sand. This is an image of God walking with us through all things. At one point there are only one set of footprints in the sand, and so God is asked why he abandoned the person at their greatest time of need. The answer is this. I didn't abandon you, that's when I carried you.

There's an adaptation of this poem. At one point there is only one set of footprints and a line in the sand running between the footprints. "Why is that, Lord? What happened there? Why is there only one set of footprints and what is that long line in the sand?" God answers, "That long line in the sand is where I dragged you for a while."

Either way, God will not abandon or forsake you. He may carry you for a while...or he may have to drag you. Either way, God will always show up and work things – even betrayal – for good.

Thanks be to God!