

Wednesday of Holy Week

Readings: Isaiah 50:4–9a, Hebrews 12:1–3
Jesus foretells his betrayal; John 13:21–32

Jesus and the disciples were gathering at the end of the day, in an Upper Room to eat, drink, chat and relax. Three or four men would recline on a couch, leaning on the left elbow and eating with the right, often leaning on the chest of the man to the left. It's an intimate scene and should have been one of camaraderie and peace... but Jesus was 'troubled in spirit'. As they ate, Jesus declares

"Very truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

Remember, these men had travelled with Jesus and with each other constantly for years. They know each other and built trust between them, so when Jesus makes this statement, it would have flooded the room with questions. Who does he mean? How, when and where will this thing happen? What would the effect be? And, more scarily, each man - even if only for a moment - probably wondered; does he mean me?

The voice of the waiter

"I blend into the background, I'm not meant to be seen or heard. I simply take empty plates and replace them with full ones. In the kitchen, a rumour went around that one of the group in the Upper Room was Jesus, the man everyone's talking about, so when I went through with more oil I kept my eyes and ears open. All the men were chatting and eating and drinking, but one sat silent, glancing up occasionally, his dark eyes moving from man to man. It had to be Jesus, though I'm not sure how I could be so certain. The bowl in front of him was running low, so I leaned in, picked it up and replaced it with a fresh one stepping away slowly... and then I heard him speak. A man further down the table leaned forward, took the golden crust of fresh bread Jesus offered him, dripping with the oil I'd just placed on the table, and popped it into his mouth. He stood to leave, grabbing his cloak with a flourish; as he slipped through the doorway, our eyes met. And my blood ran cold as he passed."



Everyone feels guilty - sometimes with good reason. As others disappoint us, so we let other people down. Judas Iscariot was so heartbroken at the impact of his actions that he would later end his own life; but our faith in Christ opens the door to forgiveness for others and ourselves.

◆Christ our friend, you ask for our love in spite of our betrayal. Give us courage to embrace forgiveness, know you again, and trust ourselves in you. Amen. ⁵

⁵Janet Morley in Angela Ashwin (ed), The Book of a Thousand Prayers: Zondervan (1996), p.138

