

Maundy Thursday **John 13:1-20 Luke 22:15-20**

A few weeks ago, I was invited to attend a seminar. The invitation was a bit of a challenge, one of those emails that makes you wish you had gone to bed slightly earlier and had begun the day feeling just a little more *pert*. Did I know that the Speaker, on this splendid and shining occasion, was 'a globally-recognised thought-leader'? I probably looked a bit abashed because I had never heard of the Speaker and I am not really sure what a 'thought leader' is. I have a kind of an idea that when Mrs Hoyle is explaining, for the third time, that you do not put silk shirts on a hot wash she may be operating as a 'thought leader', but as she has patiently explained, my judgement is not to be trusted.

The email went on to explain that, in the course of a day of briskly improving insight and supple and positive betterness

There would be experiential learning around leading large complex change in today's dynamic world, where traditional programmatic methods do not apply

A few sentences further on, I am afraid I became tired in a shamefully traditional and programmatic way and I never did sign up.

Put simply, there is advice I can do without. I am with Oscar Wilde,

I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to oneself

If you must give advice, be brief; be simple, Lord Cromer, speaking to the boys at the Leys School

Love your country, tell the truth and don't dawdle

All of which begs the question of what on earth I am doing up here, telling you things. Is this just more *advice*?

Tonight if you do not hear me say anything else, hear this, tonight we do not teach, tonight we do not tell, tonight we *describe*. The story we tell tonight and tomorrow, the story that will carry us through to Easter is not good advice. It is not Lessons for Life tonight. It is not experiential learning for today's dynamic world. We come to Christ tonight. He comes to us. Not learning, not advice; but life and death. His life and death; ours.

We have come to the Last Supper. Let's fix that in our heads. All the kerfuffle, all the preparation we associate with Christmas that is a hint of the build up to Passover. A city rammed full, remember the anxiety about finding a place to eat? A story everyone is rehearsing about freedom from oppression, getting out of Egypt. They are telling this story in a city occupied by a new Roman oppressor. It is volatile; it is edgy. The Temple is full of the story of liberation. People are looking for a Saviour. They keep hearing 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'. So let's be clear. We have stepped into a story, into *the* story, the story of God's providence and salvation. No one is listening to advice.

We heard the story of the Last Supper told by St John. We always hear John's gospel on this night. This is *Maundy Thursday*, *Maundy* because on this night a *Mandatum*, a commandment was given. From St John's gospel, this is my *mandatum*; this is my commandment - That you love one another, as I have loved you. It is the story of the foot washing, Christ on his knees as *servant*, the story that John alone tells that story that John wants us to step into. In John there is no bread, no wine, no do this in remembrance of me. There is this commandment, because John wants to ask us if we can still see the Lord of heaven and earth when he kneels before us or when he is nailed up high. Do you see, and... can you love like this?

Tomorrow though, Stephen will take us through the gospel of Luke – *the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke* and so I want us to turn to Luke tonight and to carry this story, as told by Luke, on into Easter. No foot washing, Luke tells the story of the Last Supper as a story of a meal – a very particular meal.

Let me remind you about Jerusalem at Passover. Every Jew in the city knows why they are there; what this celebration means. There is a slew of ritual acts, cups, bitter herbs, lamb that spell out the hope of deliverance, you can, literally, see it smell it, and taste it. Now, when Matthew and Mark tell this story they tell us *first* that Jesus is about to be betrayed. First the betrayal, *then* the supper. For them the Last Supper is full of shadows and deceit, the power of darkness looms over the meal. Not for Luke. Luke begins with Jesus telling the disciples

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God Luke 22:15-16

Jesus is not a victim in Luke's eyes. He knows that he will suffer, but he embraces that destiny and looks beyond it.

I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God

You might say Jesus drives this story, but that won't suffice - Jesus *becomes* this story. That is the significance of the words at the meal

Then he took a loaf of bread, ..., saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Remember, the whole city knows about Passover, everyone knows the story of the Exodus, knows about Moses, knows about the symbolism of the meal and the different foods. Jesus sweeps aside all that in an extraordinary moment.

Then he took a loaf of bread, ..., saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

All that pointed to Passover now point to him – 'This is *my* body'. The story of deliverance is his story, the hope for the future is him, ritual and worship is for him.

I said that I am not offering you advice tonight. I am not. I am offering you him. His life, his action, this eucharist. Christianity is not teaching, a code of conduct, a set of values. Christianity is life, Christ's life that becomes ours. Our faith is a continual Eucharist; a receiving of what he gives us so that we might so remember him that we become like him.

And, one thing more, one crucial point more. Tomorrow, Stephen will lead us through what Luke has to say about Christ's death on the cross. You will hear him explain that Christ's death is the gospel. The death on the cross is not a slightly unfortunate conclusion to a good story. It is not a grim chapter you hurry through before you are allowed the happy ending. The gospel is the cross; Jesus knows that, understand his death as the focus of his ministry. I told you that Christianity is life, it would be better to say that Christianity is life *and death*. Death and dying is difficult territory for us, they are our greatest frailty, they make us incomplete, they are the place where we acknowledge our limitations, our weakness our failure. It is there that Christ meets us. What he offers us in this Eucharist, what he tells the disciples at the last Supper is that we share in his death – the broken body, the spilt blood – that we might share in his life.

Tonight at the altar and in the watch, tomorrow at the cross we attend to what matters, to life and death, we see God in them, we see our living and dying gathered into God. There is no advice given. There is just the fact, the life, the death of Christ, what he bears, what he does so that we might live in hope.