

Reflection for Maundy Thursday 2021

1 Corinthians 11 v 23- 26 and John 13 1- 17 and 31 b - 35

Collect for Maundy Thursday

Lord, you are always breaking apart our communities, our identities, our images of you: open hand and heart to receive this uncalled gift, this fractured food, this feast where untouchables meet, human and divine; through Jesus Christ, the passion of God. Amen.

(Prayers for an Inclusive Church)

I'd like to begin sharing a true story which took place during my years at theological college in Argentina. A good friend of mine was co-chaplain to a near-by prison, in the city of Buenos Aires. It was during the dictatorship, and in those days, protestant church chaplains were only allowed into the prison once a fortnight, so this student teamed up with a minister, and that meant that every week the prisoners would receive a visit. Twice a month they would celebrate communion, lead by each one of the team.

Frankie, was young, so the prison guards often body searched him, quite humiliating really, left him standing stark naked in a room for as long as they wanted, and of course he was not allowed to take anything in with him, and that included elements to celebrate communion. So how do you celebrate communion in a prison chapel under those circumstances? Well, you just go ahead – Frankie would read the passage from 1 Corinthians where the apostle Paul presents the words so familiar, and then Frankie would lift an invisible and imaginary bread, break it, pass it round to the prisoners, who would break off a piece of imaginary bread, eat it and pass round this bread. The same with the cup, Frankie would lift an invisible cup, take a sip of the invisible wine, and pass it round, and each prisoner would do the same. Can you try and imagine this? Frankie always said that in no other place had he felt so strongly the presence of the Spirit, the love of God and the sense of communion as what went on in that prison. The dictatorship had not been able to isolate these people they despised, rather it had strengthened their “togetherness” and affirmed that nothing could keep God away from that communion. **I often think of this on Maundy Thursday.**

And I want to share something I experienced in 1983, in Scotland, when I was a bursar of the Church of Scotland, up in New College. A friend studying at New College invited me to visit him at home for a weekend, and on Sunday we were going to go to church. As I was an ordained elder, he invited me to join the elders of his church in distributing communion. And then added that the Church Secretary's son had been killed in the 1982 South Atlantic Conflict. I immediately said that I felt my presence would upset the father and thought it was best to just sit in the congregation. An hour later the church minister came round to tell me that this father felt it would be a wonderful sign of reconciliation if I shared in the distribution of communion. And the minister included this in his sermon. And so, in a small church in central Scotland, quite unexpectedly we all felt a deep sense of communion that only the Spirit can create. **I often think of this on Maundy Thursday.**

I am convinced that when Jesus celebrates that meal with the group of followers, he is inviting us to be part of something revolutionary transformative. Bringing together what could be so divided. A sense of intimacy, which then is seen in the reading of the Gospel. In John instead of sharing bread and wine, we read of Jesus washing the disciple's feet. Had they ever been in such close intimacy? Something that made Peter feel uncomfortable, but Jesus insisted. Also

present was the one who was to betray him, the one that doubted and all those who would run in fear and leave Jesus on his own to face what was coming.

And this is what always surprises me of those moments of Jesus - where our human inclination would have been to make sure only the right people were involved, Jesus relates to all: a denier, a doubter, a seller...they all sit round the table, they all have their feet washed, they all hear about love. They are all invited to be part of this, and it is only those who chose to exclude themselves who leave. Only one will take a definitive way out, the others will allow God's grace to heal and forgive.

Maundy Thursday was that time of coming together for the last time, soon Jesus will be taken away. But in those deep moments Jesus reminds them of what should be the motor that leads us on: "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another*".

In our world today, who are those who are being excluded from that profound communion Jesus gives to all God's people? We are living in such disruptive times, so many different places where such love, which should be our badge, is not seen, where many are excluded from the table, or the expression of deep and significant love. Why?

So this Maundy Thursday, whether we are celebrating a service with others, or at home, listening to a service or reading our Bible and Reflecting on what goes on, we are invited to be transformed by God's revolutionary grace, which reminds us that whether in a prison, or in a small church, or with people who had been at war against each other, or in the daily expression of living, *God is in the midst of us, telling us and the world how much we are loved.*

So, let us love in memory of him, as we journey to Calvary and beyond to the Garden where the tomb will be empty. God bless us all on this journey, so we come through as people transformed by love, so we too can love as we are loved. Amen



Cerezo Barredo – The meal of the Kingdom