

Reflection for Maundy Thursday 2021

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'
(John 13:31-35)

They were all going to let him down one way or the other, the disciples that is. Jesus knew that they would. Judas would betray him for a paltry sum of money, tempted only by greed as far as we can make out. Peter would deny him, not just once but three times, fearing for his own skin it seems. They argued about who was most important and not one of them could stay awake long enough to pray with Jesus on the night of his arrest. These men who had been specially chosen to walk with Jesus through his earthly ministry were going to blow it and on that Thursday night that we know as Maundy Thursday it all came to a head.

Jesus knew that he was coming to the end of his ministry. He knew that for him to be able to show the glory of God to the world he wouldn't have been able to run away from what was ahead of him and he knew that those twelve chosen disciples would play a leading role in making it happen. But before the final act he had to show them how they might grow as a community when he wasn't part of their company. So they gathered for a meal together. The different gospel writers place emphasis on different events of the evening. For John, the act of Jesus washing the feet of the other disciples has special significance – loving leadership becomes loving servanthood. Then, according to John, as Judas leaves to commit his act of betrayal the disciples are given a new commandment to '...love one another'.

It's generally thought that the word Maundy has its roots in the Latin word *mandatum* meaning command, drawing on this gospel reading. It's where our focus might rest as we contemplate Maundy Thursday. Living as we do in a blame culture it isn't very hard to imagine that after Jesus had been led away to his death, the disciples might well have succumbed to finding fault with each other. There was plenty of opportunity for recriminations..."If Judas hadn't been made treasurer"..."If Peter hadn't been so prepared to shoot his mouth off"...."If James and John hadn't been so arrogant"..."If we hadn't all been so tired". But we don't hear any of that in the gospels and I wonder whether it's because the new commandment was heeded by the remaining disciples. Loving one another meant they could forgive each other's failings. By loving one another they could support each other through grief and anguish and trials of conscience. In loving one another they could grow together as a community. By this everyone knew that they were Jesus' disciples.

It's in loving one another we too can show ourselves to be disciples of Jesus. The commandment is no longer new but every Maundy Thursday it appears in our gospel reading. It's a commandment for us as much as it was for the eleven gathered around Jesus after Judas had left. Do we obey as they did? It's something to reflect on. It was in sharing the communal meal, in service to others and in the gift of forgiveness that love shone through the early church. The love they shared was free from jealousy, self-seeking or reproach. That is the love which Jesus expects of us as we come together in today's church for by that love the world will know that we are his disciples. Amen

Ann Barlow