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**Becoming Deserters: Maundy Thursday (Mark 14: 32-42)**

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The disciples are so sure they will be heroes. And yet, barely present to the peril Jesus is in, it seems their sleep is deeper than mere noddiness after dinner. Do they have any inkling of what's coming upon them?

Jesus has spent the evening preparing them to understand, to remember his meaning. He's reimagined the Passover meal – the meal the Israelites shared on the brink of their exodus from Egypt, as they passed over the Red Sea from slavery to freedom. From now on, Jesus teaches, for his community the meal will symbolise the Passover he is accomplishing – in his body, by his blood – the Passover from death to new life, from alienation to communion.

Now they are in the garden. Night is upon them. The machinery of betrayal and condemnation has already lurched into action and Jesus begins to be distressed and agitated. It will be no easy passage. God's ministry of reconciliation is no cheap trick, no magical evasion of reality. It must go through what it purposes to heal, unbinding our chains from the inside. In Gethsemane, Jesus confronts the cost of his vocation, the agony of letting it happen, of having to trust there is indeed no other way.

Mere heroism will not cut it here. The disciples are self-deluded. They're sincere – they don't want to run away, they don't intend to. But there's nothing in them deeply rooted enough to withstand what's about to befall. Which at some level, they must know – since they keep going to sleep.

But Jesus wakes. He knows, if he's to continue faithful to his call, that he needs to be sourced in more than his own strength and good intentions. He must be utterly handed over into the life of God – not 'my will, but thine' – receiving himself from the Father's hands. Only radical humility, not self-serving heroism enables steadfastness through the descent into chaos.

We're here too, on this night, in this garden, on the brink of this betrayal. We know our propensity to go to sleep and to flee, when things are too hard to bear. Yet we hear Jesus' plea to 'keep awake' with him, to remain present – tonight, and through every night that truth is betrayed, and victims are generated. We can't manage it in our own resource – it's too difficult, too dreadful. We are overwhelmed. In humility then, let us pray for the strength to stay true and to share in the love that gives itself over for the life of the world.