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**Handed Over: Maundy Thursday (John 17: 1-5, 18: 1-24)**

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More than any other gospel writer, John emphasises the extent to which Jesus chooses his hour. At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, according to John, he delayed performing his first sign – the turning of water into wine – because, he said, 'my hour has not yet come'; at various critical points, the authorities and hostile crowds are unable to seize or arrest him, because 'his hour had not yet come'. But now at last, it is the fullness of time. 'Father, the hour has come ...' (17: 1).

What is this hour? As Jesus sees it, it's the hour when his mission to glorify God – that is, to make God known – is to be fulfilled. It's the hour when his disciples will finally be enabled to be in God, with God, as he is. How is all this to be accomplished? This definitive making known, this opening of God's life for sharing? By exactly the last means we'd expect.

Up till now, Jesus has been 'working', intensely active. In John's gospel, the Greek words '**work**' (*erga*) and '**working**' (*ergazomai*) occur frequently. Jesus is depicted as doing the works of the Father, completing creation as he heals the blind man, working – as he says – 'while it is still day'. And he does this work – freely, authoritatively. Jesus is described again and again as exercising the power of unfettered, effective action – the power to judge, to heal, to forgive, to choose his hour.

But now, at this decisive moment, when it's come time to bring all things to fulfilment, what does Jesus do? He allows himself to be 'handed over', betrayed. He lets himself be deprived of effective agency – and only in John's gospel is it said that Jesus is bound, fettered, immediately upon his arrest. It's not that he has ceased being one with the Father. When those who've come for him say they're looking for Jesus of Nazareth, he replies 'I am he' – which can equally be translated 'I am'. When

he says this, those asking for him respond as anyone would to hearing the divine name, face to face with the divine presence: 'they stepped back and fell to the ground'. Even so, he's given over to them. Somehow it will be by his undergoing what is done to him, his consenting to fall under the power of others, that his mission will be completed.

W.H. Vanstone says: 'The fact is that, at a certain point in His life, Jesus passed from action to passion, from the role of subject to that of object and from working in freedom to waiting upon what others decided and receiving what others did'.<sup>1</sup> Tonight we remember this moment – this hour of Jesus' transition from action to passion.

This is a moment of transition for us too. In the coming days, through remembrance, we are to become present once more to the unfathomable mystery, the powerful energy of Easter. Ordinary life will, of course, go on – families need caring for, meals cooking, gardens tending. But as lovers of God, as friends of Christ, we're asked to be aware of something else unfolding through this time. We're asked to bear witness, and to join with Jesus as yields himself. So let us now yield ourselves to this hour. Let us pray for courage and faithfulness over these days to let ourselves be handed over as he is.

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Vanstone, *The Stature of Waiting*, (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2006), p.31. I am indebted to Vanstone's insights for much of this reflection, including the commentary on John's gospel.