

No Reprieve (Mark 14: 26-42)*Maundy Thursday*

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In April 2015, almost three years ago, Australians Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran were executed in Indonesia, after spending almost 10 years in a Bali prison. You'll remember the story – how they were convicted of attempting to smuggle heroin into Australia, how they matured and changed during their time in prison, how there was appeal after appeal seeking the commutation of their death sentences. Until, eventually, the last appeal was refused, and there was no further possibility of reprieve. I've tried to imagine what that must have felt like for them. What it must be like to know there will be no return to 'before' and no mercy shown, that you're approaching the threshold between life and death and will soon be here no more.

It can be the same with illness. There's the process of seeking a cure, hoping that treatment will be effective, that the condition will 'yield' and the end will not be just yet. But when the chemo doesn't work, when there's nothing more to be done, then you enter into that same threshold space – death is no longer abstract, a general human truth. Suddenly, it's *your* death coming upon you, inescapable.

On this night of Maundy Thursday, here in the garden, we witness Jesus facing this same threshold. All along he's known death – execution – is the likely outcome of his ministry. He's told his disciples as much – the 'Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ... and be killed, and after three days rise again' (Mark 8: 31). Indeed, he's deliberately provoked this crisis by coming to Jerusalem at the time of Passover, and an hour or so ago he's symbolically enacted his being handed over at the Last Supper.

But even for him, it seems, there's a jolt when it actually comes to it – 'I am deeply grieved, even to death'. Jesus seems overwhelmed by sorrow and agitation – 'the fear of death rears up from where it hides in each of us'.¹ Does it have to be this way? He throws himself onto the ground and into prayer, alone and yet desperate for company, for help, for comfort. Everything in him, Laurence Freeman says, 'rejected his destiny' ... 'but [then] something else appears in this moment of panic'. It's as if his prayer has drawn him in and through the waves of agitation, into the still place at the heart of reality, the heart of God. There, says Freeman, he regains 'a sense of deep connection and ultimate purpose. With this he moves from panic to peace and acceptance'. Not what I want, but what you want; not my will, but thine. 'Centred [and] grounded' now in his union with God, Jesus gets up, he goes out to meet his betrayer's kiss and the armed guard that comes to arrest him under cover of darkness.

The fear of death is real – even for Jesus. It always threatens to eclipse our sense of connection to God and to others, to isolate us and destroy our peace. But the mystery of Easter is the revelation of a love that is stronger than death, love that willingly undergoes death so as to undo its power over life from within. Tonight, we're at the beginning of the journey through ... we're remembering the passage Jesus made and we're offering ourselves to go with him so that we too may come to live on the other side of death, the other side of fear.

How do we make this journey? Jesus asks us to watch with him, to join ourselves to his prayer, his self-yielding trust. Therefore, let us keep awake, let us keep company with him – and as we open ourselves in silence, let him draw us with him into that still centre, the heart of God, to discover our destiny there.

¹ Laurence Freeman, Lent Reflections: Tuesday Holy Week 2018', <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/16265da4c3e5c759> (accessed 28 March 2018).