

1 April 2021

**The Intimacy of Betrayal (John 12, 13, 18)**

*Maundy Thursday*

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It was not an enemy that reviled me,  
or I might have borne it: it was not my foes that dealt so insolently with me,  
or I might have hidden myself from them;

But it was you, a person like myself:  
my companion and my familiar friend. (Psalm 55)

To make yourself vulnerable to love is to make yourself vulnerable to love's betrayal.

A week ago, in the time of the gospel, Jesus has been lavished by the love of Mary of Bethany. Her devotion expresses love's knowledge. At some level, she understands where her dear friend is headed ... and Jesus knows she knows. When Judas, incomprehending, presumes to judge her extravagance for anointing his feet with such costly perfume, Jesus tells him to 'Leave her alone. She bought it for the day of my burial'. After this, Jesus speaks of his impending death ever more explicitly. But the other disciples, the male disciples, can't seem to go there.

The story of Maundy Thursday is a story of betrayal. Usually we think of Judas handing Jesus over to the soldiers and the chief priest's police. But that's only the culmination of a deeper movement. For beneath this final handing over of Jesus are betrayals layered on betrayals.

There's the persistent misunderstanding and unknowing of the twelve that bespeaks wilful blindness. Jesus has been speaking of his death, but they haven't let it in; when says he's troubled in spirit because 'one of you will betray me', they say they don't know what or who he's talking about. 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread', Jesus says, but even when he gives Judas that very piece, they still can't or won't see.

There's Peter's culpable lack of self-knowledge, the self-deception that hides from him the magnitude of what's befalling and his own lack of capacity to bear with it. Jesus had said, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward'. Peter had replied, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you'. But he won't or can't.

And in the end, there's the betrayal of their own intimacy with Jesus. Mary held true to hers; she risked shame and judgement to express it. But Judas – it's not just that he brings the soldiers, betrays his friend into hostile hands. It's that he's given him up in his heart, given up being with and for him. The text makes this explicit. When Jesus steps forward to identify himself to his enemies, saying 'I am he', 'I am', we're told that 'Judas, who betrayed him, was standing *with them*'. It's the same for Peter. After Jesus is arrested, Peter follows as far as the high priest's courtyard. But once inside, he refuses to be identified with Jesus. When asked whether he is one of his disciples, his 'I am not' is the explicit negation of Jesus' 'I am', the explicit negation of Jesus' faithfulness. Immediately after his disavowal, Peter is drawn into the cosy circle standing around the charcoal fire, a fire made by those indifferent to Jesus' fate, 'the slaves and the police'. Peter, says the gospel, was 'standing *with them* and warming himself'.

To hold out love and know they would not take it,  
to hold out faith and know they dared not take it –  
the invisible wand, and none would see or take it –  
all he could give, and there was none to take it –  
thus they betrayed him not with the tongue's betrayal.

That's the Australian poet, Judith Wright, in 'Eli, Eli'. Most of us have suffered such intimate betrayals; many of us have perpetrated them. And it's in the intimacy of his betrayal, that we discover the intimacy of Jesus' love for his disciples, for us. This is an intimacy with him we may welcome or fear, return or refuse; it's a vulnerability we may suffer with him or avoid. Here in the garden, we let it touch us, we know its cost. May it break open our hearts anew.