



14 April 2022

Passing Over (Luke 22. 7-8 & 14-18, 39-42, 45-53)

Maundy Thursday

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'This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms'.

This is the beginning of Ursula Fanthorpe's poem 'BC:AD'. In the poem, this moment of 'before turning into after' refers to the night of Jesus' birth. But in the gospels' portrayal of *this* night, the night Jesus was handed over, there's something of the same feel.

It's Passover. On this night, centuries ago, the Hebrews had been liberated from slavery in Egypt. On this night, they'd begun to become a people, belonging to God and bearing God, in a new way. On this night, their before had turned into after. And more than in any of the other gospels, Luke's Jesus is portrayed as yearning to mark this night, to remember this passing over with his disciples.

In Matthew and Mark, it's they who take the initiative; the disciples come to him, asking 'Where do you want us to make the preparations **for you** to eat the Passover?' But in Luke, it's Jesus who calls them: 'Go and prepare the Passover meal **for us** that we may eat it'. And when 'the hour came' and he had taken his place at table with them, he makes it explicit: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'. For it seems this is not just about remembering or recapitulating that first Passover meal. It's about marking the new Passover from before to after underway through him, the passage from now into a future in the process of being fulfilled. A future he calls 'the kingdom of God'.

But what exactly is this future? What's the nature of the fulfilment, the kingdom, that is coming? The disciples have no idea. After they've shared the Passover with him, they immediately begin to dispute with each other about which

of them is the greatest. Jesus tries to redirect their focus: 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them ... But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves'. Just as 'I am among you as one who serves'. But the disciples are still inhabiting 'before'; how can they possibly imagine the 'after' he's come to bring?

So Jesus faces the trial, the labour of this passing between worlds, alone. Clinging to promise, desperate to remain true, fearing to suffer and die. 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me'. His aloneness is magnified by the incomprehension and oblivion of his friends, who are asleep and missing the meaning. It's intensified by the cruelty of Judas' renunciation – 'is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?', and by the unwarranted hostility, the violence of the crowd and the authorities: 'Have you come out with swords and clubs, as if I were a bandit?'

No one gets it; no one is with him. So radically attuned to a different reality, it's as if he's already at one level passed over, already pushed out of this world's meaning. At another level, the passage is still to be made. And all there is for Jesus to do, in this hour, is to be willing to undergo it, 'not my will but yours be done'. Knowing that the only way on is through, that whatever is being wrought here must be wrought in the heart of darkness.

This was the moment when before turned into after. The moment of crisis, when Jesus accepted the cup that was his portion so the Passover might be fulfilled and a new age come to be.

This night, we remember him. Pray that we may keep faith through his time, through our time, of trial.