

Sermon for Evensong Trinity 8 2020

*“ 13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” John 13.1*

Both readings tonight reveal the wonder and the beauty of the love of God. They unveil the mystery of a God who constantly offers his love to the righteous and to the sinner. Job is alone and isolated. He is despairing for some sort of sign from God. We might suggest that while he still believes in God, there is a sense that God is absent. There comes a time in this account where God speaks to Job and describes the beauty of creation and the reality of the presence of God within that creation. The short message is that God is never absent from the life of Job, and God has never neglected nor abandoned him. It is an occasion when God shines his holy light into the darkness in order to reveal the truth and the integrity of his love.

At the supper in the Gospel of John Jesus continues in this theme of love and integrity. It was the custom of the Middle East at that time, that when dinner guests arrive, they would have their dusty feet washed by a slave. As the dinner began it became apparent that none of the disciples were prepared to be perceived as the slave, or the servant, of the other. Remember they have had a spiteful conversation concerning who was the greatest among them. Humility was not high on their list of priorities.

It is Jesus who offers to wash the feet of the disciples. He shifts the understanding of the foot washing away from what they thought to be below them, and made it a sign of love and of service. “I have washed your feet, you need to wash one another’s feet”. Jesus is calling his disciples to be servants. He is not calling them to be Lord and Master of all that surrounds them. It must have been something of a wakeup call for the disciples; especially so when Jesus explained to Peter that if he rejected Jesus act of service, act of love, he could have no part in him. Inclusion meant accepting the love offered by Jesus.

It is at this point that Jesus explains that there is one who will betray him. He is not named, but he is identified. Judas is apparently disaffected because Jesus is not acting out the role that Judas believed he should follow. Judas wanted Jesus to be the great warrior who would gather an army and defeat the Romans in a battle to end all battles. He had completely misunderstood the coming of the Messiah. Instead of modelling himself on Jesus he tried to model Jesus on himself.

What follows is an expression of divine love that can not be misunderstood. Jesus knows that Judas will betray him and he keeps trying to bring Judas back into the fold. It is considered a great complement, a sign of affection and of love, that the host would offer a morsel of his food to a particular guest. In a peculiar sort of way we see something of its intention when we see the bride and groom drinking from the one glass of champagne. It is an expression of love and trust one for the other.

When Jesus offers this morsel to Judas he is attempting to bring him out of the darkness. Jesus is encouraging Judas to turn away from the temptations of Satan. He is showing that

even while Judas may currently be led into the darkness by the devil, Jesus love for him is real. When it becomes apparent that Judas has chosen the role of the betrayer Jesus simply tells him to get on with it. There is now no way back.

As we are aware some 2000 years later the betrayal of Jesus allowed for God to overcome the devil and indeed to overcome death. It was a great victory for God's creation. It is a great victory for us.

For Judas it was a disaster. Instead of Jesus calling on vast numbers of angels, or warriors, to overcome the Romans, he went to the cross.

Judas must have been bereft. This man who had shown great love for him was now absent from him. Judas was now alone in the darkness. He had in effect rejected Jesus, rejected God. What he apparently did not know, or failed to realise, is that like the experience of Job, God had not abandoned him. The difference is remarkable. We are at liberty to reject God. We are at liberty to reject Jesus. We are free to remove ourselves from any overt expression of faith. The difference is this; when we decide that it was a silly idea to reject God and willingly open our hearts and minds, our very soul to God, then he opens his arms wide and welcomes us back into his loving embrace. In reality God has never left us.

Job discovered this unfailing love when God spoke to him and reminded him of the balance of creation, and how God loved all of it, beginning with the sea and concluding with humanity, job included.

The special message for us in these readings is that of the love that God has for each one of us. This is true even though we may at times harbour doubts about his presence in our lives. God's love for us is not a matter of what we have done in the past. It is bound to what we decide to do in the present and that which we strive to do in the future. The past is concluded and cannot be changed. there will be things that we regret and other things that we have enjoyed. But they are over and no longer have meaning for us. In our turning back to God all of our sins, our mistakes, are put aside by God so that we can make a new beginning with God as our primary focus.

Often the biggest problem that we face is our inability to forgive ourselves and therefore effectively bind ourselves to the darkness. The risk is that we will isolate ourselves and begin to think that we are loved neither by God nor by the people around us. This is not true and can be seen as the influence of the devil. Nothing works better for the devil than our own lack of self esteem and self respect.

It is not a matter of what we have done in the past. The primary matter for us in our lives is that we return to God in faith and hope. Job was raised from the depths of depression and after repenting in sack cloth and ashes was restored. Conversely, Judas failed to respond to the love that our Lord offered and he perished alone. Once he had removed himself from the presence of our Lord, and from the influence of his friends, he was lost.

From this time on let us always know and believe that no matter how low and dark our life may become, God is always present with us, and if given the opportunity, will raise us up into the fullness of life that we so often crave.