

LENTEN PROGRAMME
“Holy Week Voices from the Holy Land”
Week 2, 2021 – John 13. 1-15; 15. 9-17 [ESV]
Life-changing Encounter – John
[Adapted]

GATHERING

OPENING PRAYER:

O God, who willed your Son to submit for our sake to the yoke of the Cross, so that you might drive from us the power of the enemy, grant us, your servants, to attain the grace of the resurrection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, you Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

[John 13.1-15; 15.9-17]

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it round his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped round him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.'

... As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.'

Poem: Beloved Disciple

Why was I the only one
who did not desert or run
but stayed loyal to the end
who followed you into the torchlit shame
of the Sanhedrin's midnight courtroom game?
And who then stood by the cross
as you gasped and fought for life
the crowds baying for your blood
spitting back hatred in the face of your love?

Was it the bravado of youth
a blindness of faith
a misguided infatuation
or a misreading of the situation?
No, it was in the heat and the fire
of the Upper Room blaze
that my loyalty, my love was forged
beaten out and heavenwards raised.

You formed my heart with the work of your hands
first washing me clean, tender and kind
and then in the breaking of bread
and the sharing of wine
a new commandment, a new union
a covenant transformed, a fresh communion
a Passover like I had never known

Please take a few moments in silence to reflect on the passage

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE [Habib and Gosayna Karam]

..... Reading the poem 'The Beloved Disciple', we recognise in the disciple John's experience at the Last Supper how his whole life is turned upside down by the personal love of Jesus entering his heart. After he has been touched by God's love, his life is never the same again. Although he will have many challenges and obstacles to face, including situations and callings which at the time he does not clearly understand, he is happy to put all of his life in God's hands. God's will and God's love changes everything for John, and teaches him how to love others as Jesus loves. We feel that this experience of John is reflected very strongly in our lives together.

Life in the Holy Land has its many challenges and difficulties. As Palestinian citizens of Israel, we face many kinds of discrimination including economic, political and educational hardships. Furthermore, as Christians, we experience discrimination at the religious level. On top of all that, there is no political stability in the region which greatly impacts on our lives.

Most people have lost a sense of security and stability, now even more so with COVID-19. Many Christians who worked in tourism are now unemployed and struggling to keep their family going. However, as we live in a community where the term 'family' extends to many generations, and as a culture, we have a strong sense of community and do everything we can to serve and support each other. It is the values of giving, sharing, and caring which are sustaining many of the families during this difficult time.

For Gosayna and I, it is our faith that lifts us higher than these difficult earthly matters. As residents of the Holy Land, we try to live our faith in our daily actions and words. We live the teachings of the Beatitudes as we respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to serve our brothers and sisters in their needs. We follow, like John the Beloved Disciple, wherever the Lord leads.

Although we live in a land of no political peace, we are at peace in our lives.

Short Reflection on Scripture and the Poem

After the chill of Judas' betrayal we witness the warmth of John's pure love for Jesus. Looking back some time after the tumultuous events of those climactic days in Jerusalem, John is able to identify the moment when everything connected and crystallised in him - the moment his heart was transformed for ever by Jesus' own heart beating next to his. Whatever happened to him after that moment in the Upper Room, John would always have the strength of that heartbeat, that absolute love of Jesus to see him through.

Please take a few moments of silence to reflect on what you have read.

Question for Reflection

Can you think of your own life-changing moment when you have been touched by the tenderness of Jesus or the certainty of his passionate, personal love for you? [If not, make this your prayer this week.]

CLOSING PRAYER

To God be honour and glory. He has sealed the new covenant in the blood of Christ and renews it in the sacrament at the altar. In confidence we pray:

R: Lord, bless your people.

Lord, guide the nations and their rulers according to your will; may they work for the common good with one mind and heart. In confidence we pray:

R: Lord, bless your people.

Renew the spirit in those who have left all to follow Christ; may the holiness of your Church be revealed in their lives. In confidence we pray:

R: Lord, bless your people.

You have made all people in your likeness; help them to rid the world of every injustice. In confidence we pray:

R: Lord, bless your people.

Come with your truth and friendship to those who have lost their way; teach us how to help them. In confidence we pray:

R: Lord, bless your people.

Let the dead enter into your glory; let them praise you for ever. In confidence we pray:

R: Lord, bless your people.

In the silence of our hearts let us bring to the Father our thanks [pause]

In sorrow let us ask the Father for forgiveness [pause]

With confidence let us entrust to the Father our cares and concerns [pause]

Almighty God, by the cross and resurrection of your Son you have given life to your people. We have received the sign of the cross: make us living proof of its saving power and help us to persevere in the footsteps of Christ. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Acknowledgement:
“Holy Week Voices from the Holy Land”

[You may wish to purchase a physical copy directly from Friends of the Holy Land or obtain an electronic/digital version (also priced £7.99), both of which are available from their website: www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk

The proceeds of this book (priced at £7.99 plus postage and packaging) will go to the Friends of the Holy Land to aid their work with the neediest of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land. As with those closer to home, our brothers and sisters there have suffered dramatically during the coronavirus pandemic, including economically with the cessation of pilgrimages and tourism and the resulting loss of income]