

Sermon: 2020/04/09 (Maundy Thursday) - Exodus 12:1-14, Psalm 116:1,10-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; &, John 13:1-17,31b-35_BTR

Look again at our reading (from *John* 13) - the episode normally referred to as, "The Last Supper."

The language - as it is in the NRSV translation at least, which describes this historical event, is calm and measured.

But *don't* let it fool you:

At that *very* moment, Jesus and His disciples were in the midst *of a crisis*.

Up to their necks in it.

And struggling to stay-afloat.

Desperately, "treading water."

Firstly, they were "up to their necks" in a crisis which was intimate - one concerning their leader, Christ, and His little group, gathered around a dinner-table.

And, secondly, it was a *national* crisis.

The "intimate" crisis - the crisis specific to the Twelve and their rabbi - sprung from His matter-of-fact statement that He was about to be betrayed to His death. This "statement," in John's memory, comes after Jesus had washed the feet of His friends, but He had already spoken *openly* about being killed earlier that day - at the Temple: [[Jn. 12:27-33](#)].

In fact, He had predicted it happening *many* times.

But remember that those who heard it - those predictions, previously, had repeatedly "brushed off" the suggestion; rejected it:

Peter, for example, disbelieving that *any* such thing could *ever* happen to the lovable "Prince of Peace" contradicted the Savior during an argument about the matter in 'the district of Caesarea Philippi': [[Mt. 16:13ff.](#)].

It is an awkward, tense - *and famous* - moment:

Peter, meaning well, had said to His master: "God forbid it, Lord!"

And is called "Satan" for saying so.

Now, we mustn't forget this uncomfortable exchange in the "build-up" to the events of Easter because what it reveals; what it makes clear is that nobody apart Jesus *really* thought that He would *actually* be arrested and executed - until it took place.

And they doubted it for very good reason: Jesus, in the northern provinces, was *exceedingly* popular.

Again and again we hear of the "swollen" crowds that surged and surrounded Him.

He *looked* like the general of an army.

An "army" of peasants, shepherds, prostitutes and lepers to be sure; but, altogether, as a group, they were intimidating.

Fearsome:

some carried weaponry; *swords*.

(Luke tells us so: [22:38].)

This "mob," though, suddenly, in *largest* part, "evaporates" at the gates to Jerusalem.

The shouts of "hosanna" - which sounded to the authorities as a battle-cry - is its "last hurrah."

The "high-tide" moment of the movement.

The "waves" of that sizeable and impressive rabble "crashed" against her walls (with their palm-leaves), and then, without fanfare, dispersed.

Now, in the streets of the capital - narrow, dark and menacing, Jesus was suddenly isolated; much more exposed and vulnerable.

And as much as the disciples had found it hard to accept that any one might dare to oppose the miracle-working celebrity Galilean they had pledged themselves to, their (easier) confidence at this juncture was being *severely* shaken; beginning to crumble - like an Antarctic ice-shelf sliding into a cold, deep ocean of despair:

There, in the upper room, they were a mere "stone's throw" from a whole garrison of the best soldiers in the world: Roman legionnaires.

Shadowing the disciples too, and harassing them since they had arrived in Judea, was also the Sadducees' thugs.

In other words, they were - the disciples and Jesus - gentle, well-mannered country-boys; gentle, well-mannered country-boys on a visit to the "Big City" who had wandered into the wrong neighborhood.

Their conversation was hushed.

They clutched their valuables.

And they were doing their best to avoid looking anyone in the eye.

"Please, God, let us go unnoticed" was their prayer.

The *national* crisis collapsing in on them, however, doesn't always get the focus it deserves.

We take it for granted.

It has become "background noise" for many of us as we read the New Testament, but it was severe:

Israel, remember, was under occupation - by foreigners; *imperialists*.

It had been divided into impoverished fiefdoms among a "puppet" royal-family who weren't properly Jews.

And the religious men - the men who were supposed to be truth-tellers; Heaven's

ambassadors - the men who ran the sacrificial system - were corrupt and traitors, cowards and sneaks.

Terrorism was commonplace.

The so called "Zealots" didn't have bombs, but daggers.

And they were brazenly attacking officials and priests in daylight in public.

Robber-gangs and false messiahs roamed the countryside and the threat of open, massive war with another superpower - Persia, to the East - loomed over this whole, sorry, *chaotic* mess.

And so, I ask: "What do we see that Jesus does in response?"

There couldn't be a more pertinent question, right?

Given the pandemic.

What does Jesus, our model who we aspire to imitate - our 'example', as He call Himself - do in the face of the crises (I've described)?

What *timeless, holy* example does He set us?

The answer is simple:

He washes some feet - so, cleanliness is important ;-)
and has a party.

That's what that night was all about.

They were marking Passover.

It was a celebration!

It was a time to enjoy good food and good company.

To relax.

And this is so important for us to hear, I think:

Don't let us "lose our heads."

Don't panic.

Don't be anxious.

Of course, you might be thinking in reply: "How can I?!"

People are getting sick and dying.

Businesses are being made bankrupt."

Yes, but God is still God.

He still is the one who divided the Red Sea;
who guided and fed His people in the wilderness.

Who held out to them a "Promised Land" of bliss, and to the faithful today too.

An even better one, in fact.

And this truth casts a certain, *happier* light on our current predicament, that softens its blows.

That makes its darkness...well, less dark.

It was for this reason that Jesus and His disciples could "let their hair down" despite the crisis that threatened to crush them.

That God cares.

- *that's* what the history *behind* the Passover meal demonstrated beyond any

doubt:

That God cares.

He always had and *a/ways* will: [Lam. 3:22-23].

It is because He cares so much that He bent down to - *personally* - do "the dirty work" of the final plague, flying over the Egyptians to break their will so that the Hebrews might go free": [Exo. 11:4, 12:12,23 & 29].

And that's signifiant.

The preceding inundations against Pharaoh had been by intermediaries: frogs, "gnats," flies, and so on - obliging *servants* of nature: [Exo. 8].

The last and most terrible, however - the most effective; He did Himself.

And "it is because He cares so much" that He bent down again to - *personally* - wash the dirty feet of the very creatures He made.

Because our God cares.