

Dear Friends,

Mark 14: 17-25

Jesus and his friends are sharing the Passover meal. What's the atmosphere like? We are not given this kind of detail, but we can wonder. The disciples must be waiting for the authorities to make their play against Jesus. He has caused trouble by the way he entered Jerusalem and by clearing the temple. He has challenged and disputed with the religious leaders and teachers. It is certain that the authorities will be planning to deal with and put an end to him. The only question is when the attack will come. From their side, the friends have also done some planning. They are ready to mount an attack of their own. In Luke's gospel we are told that they have two swords. Before this night is over, one of them will draw blood. Given this background, it seems more than likely that there is tension and fear amongst the friends of Jesus as they share the meal together.

The atmosphere becomes even more tense when Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me". They took eating together seriously. When you shared a meal with someone, you created a bond with them, you committed yourself to act for their good and not for their harm. It was bad to be betrayed. It was doubly bad to be betrayed by someone with whom you had shared the intimacy of table fellowship. One of the Psalmists feels horror at the thought that this happened to him. He wrote, "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me".

The disciples are distressed by what Jesus says. Each one seems to be uncertain of themselves, wondering if they might betray Jesus. Each one says, "Surely, not I?" Do we each contain at least a little bit of a betrayer?

The meal goes on and Jesus takes a loaf of bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. He says, "Take, this is my body". Then he takes a cup of wine, gives thanks and gives it to them and all of them drink. He says, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God".

The disciples remembered this meal and the terrible events that followed. As he had broken the bread, so his body was broken. As the wine had been poured, so his blood was poured out on the cross. They remembered his suffering. It was physical certainly, but there was also emotional suffering and they knew that they were responsible for some of that. They had not been able to sit with him when he was feeling anguish. At the first sign of trouble, they had immediately abandoned him and left him to face his agony alone. Some of the women who were disciples did stand by him at the cross. They heard his desolate cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". He had lived with such confidence in God, but in the moment of death that trust was tested to breaking point.

The friends continued to eat bread and drink wine together. Whenever they did, they remembered the death of Jesus. However, they also remembered the hope

that he had given them. He looked forward to a time when he would drink in the kingdom of God. They therefore came to see this meal as a joyful feast, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for them and for all people.

On the day, in that large upstairs room, they all eat the bread and drink the wine. Jesus can see what lies ahead. He can see the betrayal. He can see his friends running away. He nevertheless gives himself to all of them, Judas included. He says, "This is my body ... This is my blood. This is me. This is what I am. This is my life". They all receive what he gives. They eat and drink. It enters into them and becomes a part of them. That's the intention, that he, what he is, his life might come to live in those who say "yes" to him and open themselves to receive him. That is given to all, that is given to you.

God bless you,

Tony