

Maundy Thursday March 24, 2016

On this night, we slowly make our way towards Good Friday. On this night we do not rush towards the cross that lies ahead, we wait. We wait, experiencing the Christ who comes to wash our feet, the Christ who comes to nourish us with His body, the Christ who prays for the unity of His Church, and the Christ who will be betrayed. On this night, we give witness to the Christ who wholly came to be for us, Jesus who came into the world to speak God's grace to a world that knew only wrath. As we anticipate where we are headed tomorrow, as we come before Christ the Servant wondering what Christ sees in me when I see so little in myself, on this night we find an answer to the question, how does Christ look upon me? Tonight, we follow Jesus into the garden, we follow Jesus into the darkness of the night to a place we have been so many times before. So let us again follow Jesus into the garden, asking, how does Jesus look upon me.

When we come into the garden, night has fallen, it is dark, and this place where Jesus often gathered with His disciples becomes almost unrecognizable. It is in the night that our fears overwhelm us, our loneliness becomes overbearing, it is in the nighttime that we feel exhausted and depleted and we wonder if we have lost our way. So of course Jesus is arrested at night, of course it is at night that those who fear the freeing words of Christ bind him, of course it is at night that those closest to Jesus abandon Him. After Jesus spends the entire seventeenth chapter praying for the unity of His disciples, Judas comes to Jesus in the darkness. Judas comes with Roman soldiers and police from the chief priests, carrying lanterns and torches and weapons. In their fear, the Jews, Gentiles, even His own disciple have gathered against Him, leaving Jesus completely alone. Truly, the world has gathered to snuff out the light of the world, to leave behind only the dark night. In fear they are determined to arrest and kill the One who they do not

understand, the One who threatens the way things are, the One who announces an end to their fears. And as we peer into the dark, and see our fears reflected in the fear of those gathered, we ask ourselves, how does Christ look upon me?

While the world is coming to arrest Jesus, the world that Jesus came to forgive, to reconcile to God, the world that Jesus came to save, Judas stands alone in the crowd as the one who betrayed Jesus. Judas in the Gospel accounts and our collective memories has received so little compassion. We have always been hard on Judas. He is singled out as the betrayer of Christ, even though it is all of our hands which bound Jesus. But could it be that we show Judas so little compassion, because we worry about the voice of Judas in our own hearts. The voice that would make us betray our own convictions, the voice that would make us forsake someone we had followed so closely. At the Last Supper when Jesus declared that one of the twelve would betray Him, we find that all of them ask Jesus, surely not I, as if to say I have been worried about this, I have had my doubts, but I thought I had it under control. We witness how fragile they all are, how close they all are to being Judas. As we read this story year after year, before we get to the cross we first have to encounter Judas, the Judas who exists in all of our hearts. The Judas we have so little compassion on, the Judas that we try to hard not to see in ourselves. And we ask ourselves, how does Jesus look upon me?

As we follow our reading, Jesus is far from being overcome by this crowd, He commands the narrative. Knowing what is about to happen, Jesus comes forward, He seeks out this mob driven by fear and His disciple overcome by doubt, to ask who they are looking for. Three times He declares to them exactly who He is, He is Jesus of Nazareth, He is in control even as they come to arrest Him, He is the One who can go to them in grace while they go out in fear, He is the One who can command the mob to let His disciples go, He is the One who gives freedom as

He is about to be bound. The text boldly declares, this was to fulfill what Jesus had said that not one of those who had been given to Him would be lost, even as Jesus' betrayer stands before Him, seemingly lost. Precisely when things seem to be falling apart, when the words of Christ seem to be proven false, the text declares that in this moment they ring true the loudest. Even as Judas stands with his mob behind him, we know how Jesus looks upon Judas. Even as we have doubts and fears, and worry about the Judas within our own hearts, we know how Christ looks upon us. Christ looks upon us counting us as His own, never to be lost even in the darkest night.

Suddenly, Peter takes out his sword, where did Peter get a sword? He obviously doesn't know how to use it because he only manages to cut the ear off the high priest's servant. But throwing Himself into this mob, is just another way of betraying, it is just another way of rebuking Jesus on His mission towards the cross. Just as violence was about to break out, Jesus steps into the middle and tells Peter to put his sword away. Jesus looks upon Peter, who will soon deny Jesus, and says no more, no more violence, no more hatred, no more fear, no more division. Jesus takes on the violence, the fear, the hatred of the world, that is the cup that only He can bear. Jesus looks on us in our anguish, in our fear, and says I understand your pain and suffering, that is why I am here, I will not keep silent, I will not abandon you to the darkness. I will not look away from you even as you look away from Me. As we ask how does Christ look upon me, He responds, with never ending comfort and grace, looking upon us as only He could.

Jesus looks upon Judas, Peter, the Roman soldiers, the Jewish police, all of us, as those in desperate need of a Savior without division. That is how Jesus looks upon us. Jesus looks upon us, commanding that we be free, as He is bound and led away towards the cross of Good Friday. Even as we doubt, even as we betray, we know that Jesus looks upon each one of us, as a Servant

washing out feet, as the One who gives meaning to our Communion, who looks upon us in the darkness of this night, as the God who is dying to love us.