

Night & Day : An Intimate Betrayal

John 13:18-38

I wonder how you're going with this developing Coronavirus *situation*. I've been wondering whether to say much about it this week. I keep swinging from one side of the pendulum to the other – say something, don't say something. Keep it positive, acknowledge the realities... Paint a picture of hope, allow us to engage in a right lament about what is taking place in the world around us at the moment.

It's a tricky balancing act, and day by day I find myself walking that tightrope. I suspect you might be finding the same thing.

As we look at the scriptures today, I think we find that tension there on the night before Jesus died. As he shares that bittersweet time with the disciples, who don't really know what lies ahead for Jesus or for themselves. As Jesus prepares them for what's to come, as much as they can understand. Jesus paints a picture of hope, and glory, but not without acknowledging the pathway that both he and his disciples will follow along the way...

So it's a bit of a bittersweet passage that we engage in this Sunday, perhaps appropriate in the leadup to the bittersweetness of the cross, which we remember on Good Friday, just a few days from now...

So as we open John 13 today, will you join me in asking God to be with us as we hear him speak today.

Our heavenly Father, we find ourselves in this strange space, between hope and despair, just like Jesus' disciples on the night before Jesus died. Our Father, in the midst of our distress, will you be with us, will your presence rest on us and fill us with comfort. Will you remind us today of the way that your plans will not be thwarted; that this darkness will not last forever; and that your Son will rise, just like he did on that Sunday 2000 years ago. Father, teach us how to live in light of that promise. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Well, make sure you have your Bible open. We'll be following these chapters on Sundays over the next couple of months, and we'd love you to take this opportunity to get into God's word with us here at Yountville Community Church. We also want to keep the discussion going

during the week. So make sure you also download the study notes that go with the series, and let us know on your Connect Card that you'd like to join one of our Zoom Bible Studies.

Night

But as we get back into John 13, let me remind you where we started last week. It's the night before Jesus' death. And Jesus has gathered his disciples in the upper room, where he prepares them for what is to come the next day. He shares a meal with them, he prays for them, he spends his last moments with them.

It's an intimate portrait, more intimate even than Da Vinci's last supper would have us believe. By the way did you see the Coronavirus version of the Last Supper where Jesus is at the table all by himself and the disciples have just called in on Zoom?



Well it's not like that. In this passage we see that the setting in the upper room was even more intimate than the original Da Vinci picture. Come down to v23 with me – where John tells us that the disciples were reclining at the table, that is, leaning back on cushions around a low table, one beside each other.

And it's there in that intimate setting, that Jesus is betrayed by one of the twelve. Let's pick up the story at v21:

²¹ After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

We see Jesus troubled in his spirit at the knowledge that one of his disciples would betray him. And the disciples are all wondering **how** it could be, that one of his own would go behind his back. And they wonder **who** it could be...

In v23 we're told that the one whom Jesus loved was reclining closest to him. This *disciple whom Jesus loved* is most likely John, the writer of this gospel. And the original language tells us he leans his head back, right up against Jesus' chest, where Jesus probably whispers the answer to that question – "Lord, who is it?" As the readers, we're brought into that intimate audience with Jesus, to learn the detail that probably only John knew at the time.

And this is what Jesus says:

²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly."

It's hard to imagine the discord of this exchange. Jesus offers bread, the symbol of fellowship, an OT symbol of covenant. And Judas takes the bread, then gets up and goes out into the night. Jesus has presumably just washed Judas' feet, another symbolic act pointing to the washing away of sin that Jesus would accomplish on the cross just hours later – a gesture of love and sincerity...

But Judas has given himself to another master. I'm not sure what to make of v27 – I don't know what it means that Satan entered Judas. It seems like Judas had already begun to make plans to betray Jesus, but this is the decisive moment where he looks Jesus in the eye and makes his final choice.

It's an intimate betrayal.

John marks the symbolism of the moment in v30:

And it was night.

In that comment, John reminds us of the darkness that pervades this world: the darkness that pervades every human heart, the darkness of greed, the darkness of desires unbridled... This is the darkness that leads us to consume the world's resources without thought to the future; the

darkness that leads us to consume the poorest people in this world in our desire for economic prosperity; the darkness that causes us to betray those closest to us...

It's the darkness of sin, which reaches into every corner of the good world that God made, bringing decay and death, causing the world to groan under its burden.

In one way, it's still night. We still live in a world governed by decay and death.

And that's the reason why we shouldn't be surprised when death intrudes into the modern Western utopia that we have created for ourselves. As a society we've done such a good job of creating the illusion of control: the illusion that we are in control of our financial destiny, in control of our own health, in control of the ageing process, the masters of our own destiny, and the kings of our own kingdoms.

And then along comes another king – a tiny virus shaped like a crown, and in the space of a month it rattles the economy, it steals jobs, it empties the shelves and it takes the lives of those who are too young to die.

The coronavirus has reminded us that we are not in control of our lives, and that we live in a world where there are dark forces at play.

When Judas goes out into the night, we are reminded of the darkness that is still at work around us... And in us.

It's the reason why Jesus would go right into the heart of *that* darkness the following day, why Jesus would confront death face to face. To defeat sin and death once and for all. And this Friday as we think about Easter, we'll be reminded that *the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...* (John 1:5)

Day

Because for all the darkness in the world, the story of Jesus Christ is the story of light overcoming darkness, the story of day dawning after the long night. In Jesus' death on the cross we see the beginning of a sweeping victory over every power of darkness.

It's a story that God could have finished all in one day. God could have seen the penalty of sin dealt with in Jesus, he could have raised Jesus to eternal life on the third day to reign victorious alongside him, and he could have wrapped history up like a book. That could have been the day

of God's final judgment, and God could have brought in the new heavens and the new earth on that third day after Jesus' death.

But that's not what God chose. Instead he has chosen to let this world continue for 2000 years since that day. And God has chosen to allow the darkness to continue for 2000 years as well, without bringing it to a definitive end just yet.

And so we have to ask, how could a good God allow the effects of sin to play out in the world when he has already enacted a plan to end the curse of sin in Jesus Christ?

I think we find the answer in vv31-32. You see, God's glory is wrapped up in his plan to redeem a people who have intimately betrayed him. In Christ's death, and in his resurrection, as he deals with sin and creates a new way for sinful people to be restored to relationship with their Creator, God's glorious plan of salvation is revealed. God's glorious character of loving faithfulness, of justice and of mercy is revealed. This whole plan reveals God's glory, and it brings him glory when his plan shines light into the darkness of this world.

V31:

³¹ When [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

Even in the midst of this Coronavirus outbreak, our God is being glorified as people who are afraid for the first time *reach* out to him for life. Jesus is glorified as we proclaim the cross and bring salvation to those who belonged to the night. For 2000 years, God has been receiving the glory he deserves as his people cry out to him in thankfulness for forgiveness, for hope, and for new life.

Because God's patience means salvation, and now is the time of God's favour. Now is the day of salvation. So what are we doing to bring glory to the Father? What are we doing to bring glory to Jesus?

Well Jesus leaves his disciples with a command. A way of living that will cause everyone to know that we are his disciples, a way of living that means the church shines the same light of the gospel into our dark world.

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Seems like a simple enough command, doesn't it? Jesus has showed us what it means to love to the very end. He has set an example of how we are to love one another, and we are to do the same.

Now there are some things we can't do that Jesus did – we can't die on a cross for the sins of others. We don't need to, because Jesus has already done that. But in another way, we are called to die to ourselves, to lay down our lives in service of Jesus, to lose our lives in order to save them.

Again, what does that look like in everyday life? In Yountville, California in 2020?

Well, we saw last week the example that Jesus set of washing the feet of his disciples. Taking on the very nature of a servant, he humbles himself rather than demanding his rights, he chooses to be last rather than first. He is content to do the jobs that most people would consider beneath them... In our church community here at Yountville, what would be the ministry tasks that aren't glamorous but need doing?

In one of my ministry positions, I arrived my new church and a member forthrightly told me how the previous pastor always arrived early to clean the toilets. We were meeting in a school building, and I was glad to know, so that we could make sure the restrooms were in good shape for church. But the gentleman from church who told me, well I guess he could have just taken on the job himself, rather than suggesting I should do it.

I'm sure there are other unglamorous jobs in the life of a church. And I don't just mean cleaning. In a church shaped by love, people will constantly look outside of their own needs to serve the needs of others. That might mean practical support. In our current context it will certainly be emotional support. And spiritual support.

It's a strange time not being able to visit one another, and I think we really *shouldn't* do physical visitation for the sake of protecting the most vulnerable and flattening the curve.

But that doesn't stop us reaching out by other means. Remembering others in prayer. Calling them on the telephone. Sending an email or text message or connecting on zoom. Or even putting good old, fashioned letters and cards in the post.

At this time of social distancing, I'm struggling as an extrovert. I crave contact and conversation with people. And I have 3 other people in my household. What about those living alone? Those whose family lives further away? Those who are particularly vulnerable to this illness? How can you be a servant by reaching out at this time?

Perhaps you're listening now and you're feeling desperately alone at this time, and you'd love someone to give you a call. Will you let us serve you, will you let us reach out to you?

We're acutely aware how confusing this whole situation is, and how isolating. And so we've tried to make sure that every person on our church role has received a phone call or a message just to check on how you're going. If we've somehow missed you, or you'd like someone to give you a call, to pray with you, to get you connected with some others from our church, we'd love to serve you in that way, and to love you in that way.

I've been served in that *very* way in recent weeks. Thank you to everyone who has sent me cards and letters and emails, and for those who've called. It's hard for me not having you physically in front of me, and I can say that on behalf of the whole church staff. We love you, and we miss you, and we long for the day when we can gather in the same space, 6 feet apart of course, doing air hi-fives! We really look forward to just *being together*.

But that might be some time away.

And so for now, our task is to love one another from a safe social distance.

But not just for our sake. Because when we love one another like Jesus has loved us, Jesus says it there in v35 – when we love like Jesus, the world will know there is something different about us. Our non-Christian family will know there is something different about the way you are coping because of the way the you are loving, and being loved, by our church family. Already some of you are doing that, as you share these video podcasts with family far and wide. What a blessing! Let's pray that these videos help each of us come to a deeper understanding of God's plan, and to faith and hope in Jesus!

Because the message of Jesus Christ is *light* in the middle of this darkness that we're experiencing at the moment. The darkness might get darker in coming weeks and months, as the coronavirus hits closer to home. And it's my job as your pastor to prepare you for that likelihood. To prepare myself for that likelihood.

There's a reality about our coming death that our society doesn't want to think about. But as those who follow a risen saviour, we needn't shrink back, **even** from death. That's not to say we should court death and break the quarantine rules. No.

But it means we can face the fact that *will* all die someday, sooner or later. And in our death, we can be certain that there is life on the other side for those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ. It means we can face any and every circumstance, any and every darkness, any and every challenge knowing that there is victory on the other side of death, a victory won 2000 years ago when Jesus died and rose again. That's the glory of Jesus, the glory of the cross, and the glory of the gospel.

They say that the night is always darkest just before the dawn. Well, we've already seen the Son rise...

Will you pray with me?

Prayers : Joanna Bidwell

Heavenly Father, we praise you as the sovereign Lord of the universe. You are in control and you are our hope.

Psalm 18 says:

'I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise.

Thank you for this desperately needed reminder that we need you. Lord, we confess that we spend so much time thinking and acting as if we were self-sufficient. Forgive us. Help us to remember that we depend on you for everything we need, whether we feel healthy or sick, whether the global economy is healthy or sick. Use this time to teach us to trust you more and more during good times, the normal everyday times and bad.

Please heal those who are already ill from this virus. Thank you for our health care teams working tirelessly to heal and comfort many. Please prevent the elderly and others who are especially vulnerable to this virus. Please intervene to slow the spread of this virus in countries all over the globe. We pray this for your glory.

Lord, as schools are now shut until the end of the school year, we pray especially for Seniors who miss out on the many special events that happen towards the end of the school year for them. Give them comfort in their time of grief and may their schools, teachers and families support them and love them. We pray also for students, teachers and families, that learning can continue online, that they feel supported and encouraged in their roles.

Father we pray for Pastors, who are responsible for your people across our nation and the world. We pray for the men and women of the gospel who carry the weight of caring, supporting and ministering to many different people through different means is heavy. There is decision fatigue, grief of ministry changes, identity and work structure confusion and the impact on marriages and children. Help us as a church to pray for our own Senior Pastor, Dan Bidwell, for those on our ministry staff and pastoral care team. Lord, we pray for times of rest and refreshment in you, to look after themselves physically, mentally and spiritually and to continue to know and trust you and to continue in their roles.

Lord, we commit all these things to you, praying for your will to be done, for us to love one another, as you have loved us and for your glory. In Jesus, Amen