



***Passion Sunday 2005***

***Isaiah 50: 4-7    Philippians 2:6-11    Matthew 26: 14-27***

Our great God has given me a disciple's tongue so that I may offer to the weary a word of encouragement.

Morning after morning God gives me a disciple's ear that I may be attentive to the needs of the world.

These words from Isaiah could be our morning prayer, a reminder to begin the day conscious of our baptismal commitment to carry on the work of God. The true disciple is attentive, attuned to the mind and heart of God.

The passage from Isaiah ends with a note of sadness mixed with some pride. "I haven't rebelled even when I've been attacked" It is a mystery that liberation is often a cause of suffering. History records countless examples of people who worked and struggled to bring freedom to others only to die in the attempt, sometimes at the hands of those they were trying to save. Somehow the challenges, risks and sufferings of living freely are more frightening than a certain ease in a slavery that is all they know.

Matthew's passion story begins with the conspiracy of the chief priests and elders. This is a dark passage full of plotting and treachery as the religious leaders seek to contain any challenge to their authority.

Such an attitude does not surprise us. Sadly we are accustomed to many in positions of power who use their office to protect themselves and their own interests. Jesus is just another who is expendable, sacrificed in the interests of state and religious security.

There is still more betrayal, this time from within the community. Again, the scenario is all too familiar. "How much?" "What's it worth?" Judas didn't attempt to package his treachery in high-sounding philosophical arguments. He knew that time was running out for Jesus. As an opportunist he saw that he could salvage something from his time spent with Jesus.

In contrast to, and place between these two stories of betrayal, like a lamp in the darkness, Matthew inserts the story of the extravagant woman. As we move closer to Easter, which is a celebration of extravagant love, the story of this anonymous woman says much to us of the loving service that marked Jesus relationship with God.

As Jesus sits at the table, enjoying the hospitality of a friend, a woman enters carrying a jar of very expensive perfume. She pours it on the head of Jesus in the priestly action of anointing a king. She performs this action in silence. there is no

need for words, like all good symbols the action is clear. The comment that follows comes not from strangers but from the disciples. "What is the point of such extravagance?"

The disciples reveal that they too are betrayers. Having witnessed the lavishness with which Jesus has spent his energies for others and having heard Jesus speak of the prodigality of God, they are still small-minded.

Jesus recognises the Spirit at work in the woman and proclaims that all generations will acknowledge her gesture. "I assure you, when ever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she did will be her memorial."

Discipleship is a call to be generous with our time, talents, and energies. Isaiah's "morning after morning" reminds us of this daily call to faithfulness. We are called to be hearers of the Word so that our actions are coloured and flavoured by an outpouring of liberality- a sign of the action of God.

Paul records for us an ancient hymn proclaiming the glory of the risen Christ.

Christ, godly in form, did not cling to his equality to God, as if divinity might somehow be exploited. He emptied himself and in obedience he served humanity. In his perfect love God made him the pinnacle of creation. When we pray "Jesus is Lord!" we give glory to God.

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