

GOOD FRIDAY – TABLEAU

In this drama, we see Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper table.



Were the disciples faithful or fickle -- Extraordinary or merely ordinary humans? They were both -- and more. Each of Jesus' followers had his own temperament, shortcomings and background. When Jesus uttered the startling statement, "One of you will betray me," every disciple inwardly asked the painful question, "Is it I, Lord?" Their musings are marked by remembering ... and regretting. Together with the twelve, each of us can ask the same question: "Is it I, Lord?"

"Called to a life of service and love"

NATHANIEL (BARTHOLOMEW)

My name is Nathaniel, although I'm also called Bartholomew...it's a family thing! We're from Cana, only 3 or 4 miles away from Nazareth. Funny, though - I didn't get to know Jesus until after many of these others here. I don't know why, really – our paths just never crossed.

Our family owns fruit orchards. One day, I was out in the orchards reading the scriptures. I find it restful out there. Under a fig tree. I used to sit there when I should have been working, frankly – I've always loved the scriptures and would much rather read them than work in the fields...even when I was a little boy.

One day I was sitting there, and my friend Philip came running – as fast as anything! “Nathaniel!” he almost shouted. “We have found the One Moses wrote about in the scriptures....the one the prophets told us about!”



Well, I’ve known Philip for a long time and I know he can sometimes get carried away. So...I rolled up my scroll and gave him that “OH REALLY?” look. Philip just kept right on. “He’s Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth!” “Nazareth? Has anything good ever come out of that place?” I admit that’s exactly what I said. But Philip wasn’t put off by sarcasm. He kept right on going as though he hadn’t heard that part. “Come with me” he said “you might change your mind.”

So we left the orchard, and came to a place where lots of people gathered around a young man. He was brown from the sun, and smiling. That was my first impression of him – healthy, and smiling. As we got closer, Jesus turned to me and said “Here comes a real Israelite – there is nothing false in him.” That stopped me short. ME?

I asked “how do you know who I am?” Jesus smiled that smile again. “I saw you when you were under the fig tree, Nathaniel, before Philip called you”. I was startled; flattered too, I have to say. Jesus had noticed me. Imagine! AND called me an Israelite. One expects to be called a Jew, but “Israelite” speaks of the covenant God made with our ancestors in the faith, it was a big compliment. It spoke to me, in the language that touched me most deeply. The language of our people, of our history. Just like in the scriptures I loved to study.

I dropped to my knees and said “Rabbi, you are the son of God – you are the King of Israel” – honestly I don’t know what came over me to say those things but...I did. It seemed right at the time....and since that time I have been learning what I meant.

Jesus smiled again and said “follow me, Nathaniel, and all of you too. You will see much greater things even than this.” And so I followed him. And in these last years with him, I HAVE seen him do greater things than I ever imagined. Just as he said. But of all the great things Jesus did, the greatest as I see it is that he called me from under a fig tree to a life of service and love.

He says one of us will betray him. I don’t understand. I pray with all my heart he did not mean me.

HYMN – VU 562, Galilee

***Jesus calls us’ o’er the tumult of our life’s wild restless sea,
Day by day his clear voice sounding,
Saying, “Christian, follow me.”***

“Our differences seemed to fade – through and for Jesus, we are friends.”

SIMON THE ZEALOT

I’m the other Simon. A terrible thing, that. To be known as “the other one” – but there it is. I’m the Simon who never got the attention that Peter received; but I’m still here at the table, still one of the inner circle.

I’m called Simon the Zealot. We’re fighting men, we Zealots. Remnants of an army who fought a holy war against the Romans. Our revolt was crushed, and so we went into hiding. That was when I joined up with Jesus. I sensed a strength in him – he had all the makings of an important leader – I figured he’d be the next political hero. Doesn’t hurt to get in on the ground floor I always say.

Very soon, though, I began to see that this guy is no fierce crusader. His methods are...different, and by the time I figured that out, I was pretty taken with him anyway. How he deals with people, the things he teaches? I didn’t want to break away from him, or from this group. Jesus’ gentle ways and love for the poor made me think hard about my own violent past – it seemedcrude in comparison. So I would have to say that I’ve changed a lot because of this man.

But – one day, there was a crisis. A new disciple had joined us that day; Jesus introduced him as Levi. He was a slight, studious looking man and what we knew about him is that he had given up a well paying job in Capernaum to join us. I knew I had seen him before,and then it came to me. This man was a TAX COLLECTOR! He had worked for those cursed Romans – bleeding his brother and sister Jews dry of their hard earned money! He was a robber, a traitor, a thief. What was Jesus thinking, inviting him to become one of us??? I’ll tell you how I’d deal with the likes of him – dark alleys and sharp knives used to work wonders on men like him.

I kept quiet but the others could sense my hatred. They all felt the same way I did too. I was the one who felt it the most though...I was seething. I had gone back so quickly to my old ways of thinking and behaving...the violent thoughts came rushing back. Isn’t it funny how that happens? Change happens slowly, and often in a crisis we revert to old ways. That’s why it’s important to have each other to be honest with...and why the grace of God is so vital...but I’m getting ahead of myself.

I had gone back to hatred and to violence, at least in my heart. Jesus knew it of course, and one evening, he called me aside. We sat by the fire and we talked. “Levi is one of us” Jesus said. “He has given up his old ways. He is turning his life around. You are too – and you have to *keep* turning. Don’t go back Simon – don’t go back. I’ve seen your clenched fists. If you love me, let it go. He is your brother.”

I followed him away from the fire and into the darkness. As we walked up the hillside, someone else fell into step beside us. It was Levi.

By then, we were out of earshot of the group. Jesus dropped to his knees and pulled the two of us down beside him. Then he began to pray aloud. He prayed for me, and for Levi too. That we would grow to understand one another; that we could let go of old quarrels and let love and respect for each other take over.

Honestly – as his voice rose and fell in the darkness it was as though God’s own arms were around me and Levi too and held us both close. I wept; for the first time in....I don’t know how long. I wept.

Levi and I went back down that hill together. Our differences are still with us, it’s not magic, you know...but after that, they seem to fade somehow in the light of the love of God that Jesus showed for both of us. Pray for me, please, and for Levi my brother

And for all of us who try, with God’s help, to overcome quarrels with each other and to follow in Jesus’ way. I can’t imagine my life without Jesus now; I pray I never have to face that.

HYMN – To the tune of #331, Aurelia

***Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us
Teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace
Be present, God, among us and bring us to believe
We are ourselves accepted, and meant to love and live.***

***Let your acceptance change us so that we may be moved
In living situations to do the truth in love
To practice your acceptance, until we know by heart
The table of forgiveness, and laughter’s healing art***

“How can death serve the cause of God?”

JAMES THE YOUNGER

Yes I am James. Not THAT James. They call me James the Younger. I’m the son of Alphaeus. I bet you didn’t know that I’m the brother of Matthew there, we used to call him Levi at home. You won’t hear much from me about our ‘brotherly’ relationship – Levi and I have gone our separate ways since we were boys. He was always different and he left home as soon as he could. It seemed he just never fit into our family. You know how some families are like that? Someone who just doesn’t seem to fit?

And then he took that job as a tax collector - It almost killed our family I can tell you that. We were all so ashamed. I just couldn’t understand how he could do something like that. To work for the hated Romans? To support that tyrant Herod – I was angry. More than angry. My own brother, a traitor! We parted company for good, or it seemed that way. Didn’t speak one word to each other for years. Living

in the same town, that wasn't easy. I know he came to see mom sometimes but I'd stay away. She tried to talk to him and always I'd find her crying when I came home and I hated him even more for that.

Sometimes I used to imagine what it would be like to have a brother I could talk to – the easy laughter and joking I saw with brothers in other families. I ached to have a relationship like that. Butthat's not the way it was, and so I'd just say "forget it James, he's not worth it" to myself and look the other way if I saw him coming.

So how is it, you're saying to yourself, that we're both here at this table, followers of this teacher from Nazareth? Good question! Partly, you know the answer; how Levi (we call him Matthew now) was called by the teacher and has become a changed man. I could see that it was for real; the old defensiveness and anger in him was...it was gone. When you've been rejected by your own family, as we rejected him, you develop a crust that isn't easy to get through, and in Levi, Jesus removed that shell.

As for me – I joined the teacher because....because....I guess you'd say I had a longing in me too. I wanted something worth living for. Something I could give my life to. Do you know what I mean? Something that makes sense of this crazy world we live in. There are lots of things that try to capture our loyalty; lots of voices calling for our souls...how does a person decide? How do YOU decide what to live for?

I'm searching. I'm still young – younger than the rest of this crowd anyway. I saw in Jesus somethingsomething that calls to me, even though I can't say what, or how.

I see how Jesus treats everyone with respect. I like that. I see that Jesus loved my brother when I couldn't. I see that his love and acceptance changed him. It changed me too. After he joined, I was able to talk with Levi, tell him about my feelings – the rage, the hurt, and the loneliness. And about how, in the deepest part of my soul, what I wanted most was my big brother back.

I have him back now. We still fight sometimes, and Jesus has to talk to us about our tendency to compete with each other. I think that often, brothers and sisters do that, don't you? But in Jesus' love we work at it; and keep on trying. I have finally found something and someone I can give my life to.

I wonder what the future will bring for me, for my brother and for all of us?

HYMN VU 567

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be sown, will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown in you and you in my?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

“Can it be that love is power?”

THADDEAUS

I’m Thaddaeus, and proud to say I’m a patriotic Jew. I look forward to the time when Israel will throw off the Roman yoke and become a great nation once again.

I’ve been with Jesus many months now. I started to follow him because I liked the way he walked boldly and bravely among all kinds of people: Romans, Jews, rich, poor....and the way he stood up for the common people. He has all the qualities a good leader needs. A bold face, a quick tongue, good common sense, and a clear devotion to his cause.

What IS that cause? That’s what has me confused right now. Sitting at this table....I have to say that I’m very confused. At first I thought we agreed: preparing for the Kingdom of God on earth. That’s what he said. But what did he MEAN? Clearly to me, it means getting rid of the Romans. Simple.

So I thought at first...he’s just moving slowly to give himself time to build a following. Ok. I can go along with that. So I waited, followed, watched while the crowds grew and his support increased....and I waited for him to make his move.

But then...some things he said didn’t fit in. Don’t build much fever for fighting, you know? “Return good for evil” he said not long ago. And “If a man makes you go a mile with him, go with him two miles” Well everyone knows who it is that forces us to walk with them – it’s the cursed Roman soldiers, who can just stop anyone they want to and force them to carry their gear. Not much chance you’ll find ME going the second mile I can tell you that! What was he trying to do?

“Love your enemies” he says....maybe he’s trying to speak in hidden meanings; maybe he thinks if the Romans are listening they’ll think he means it and let down their guard...and THEN we’ll attack! Still, I wish he’d get on with it.

Here we are at the Passover meal. This is the right time; the crowds are with him, and this is the time of year when we remember how Moses and Miriam and Aaron led the people out of slavery in Egypt....this is the feast of freedom! And you can be sure they didn’t lead us out of Egypt just so we could be enslaved again by another tyrant. We must act – the time is NOW surely Jesus can see that.

He said just now that one of us would betray him.

Would it seem horrible to you if I said that there’s a way that I feel betrayed by HIM? If he doesn’t act now, if he doesn’t use his power to drive out the Romans....what good is that power anyway? I asked him to show me his power. He said that his power is the power of love.

Can it be true that love is power? Have I misunderstood all along? And has that misunderstanding been the betrayal he meant? I pray that the Holy One, will help me understand – can it really be that love is power???

Instrumental reflection

“He has shown me where He lives; in the hearts of people, and in my heart.”

ANDREW

I’m Andrew. I’m a fisherman by trade, from a little village at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. And I’ve been following this man up and down the roads of this country for almost three years now.

Sometimes I wonder – why did I give up fishing to do this? Oh I go back from time to time and help out, my brother Simon does too – but mostly we’ve left it for our father to do. Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if I had stayed.

One day, Jesus came to the shore, and said “come with me, and I’ll make you fish for people”. And I went! It seems crazy even to me, and I’m the one who did it. I went and got my brother Simon and both of us followed him. Why? Good question. Curiosity, for one thing. What did he MEAN by saying that? “I’ll make you fish for people”.

There was pride too. Because crowds were following Jesus to see his healing and hear him preach. It was flattering at first to be associated with such a popular man.

Deeper, though, there was a sense of hunger inside me. A need that nothing in my life had filled until then. I’d started fishing because that was the family business....but I always felt that I was supposed to do something else. And when Jesus came along, I thought....is this it? Is this what God’s plan for me is? Jesus hinted that there was so much more to life – and I wanted – no, I NEEDED to find out what that was.

So....my brother and I, and these others, all of us here, have lived with Jesus, watched and listened to him. I haven’t always understood what Jesus has been saying, ...often I felt as though my understanding was floundering like a loose fish on the bottom of my old boat; slippery to grasp, hard to catch. But I have understood the things Jesus does. He loves the poor and hungry. I was the one who found that little boy with the five loaves and two fish....and that day we all saw Jesus feed 5000 people with that meagre lunch. He is compassionate with the poor and with those who are ignored by most people.

Jesus once used my boat to escape the people who crowded around him. But he didn’t row across the lake. We stopped a little way out, and he told the people a story about the sower and the seeds. Some of that story took root in me I think. And now I know why I left home and fishing to follow him. It has to do with ...doing what your heart tells you to do; and with finding your best way to serve God. The thing that gives you joy and satisfaction and makes you grow, like the seed in that story.

When I first met Jesus I asked him “where do you live?” and he said “Come on, I’ll show you”. He HAS shown me where he lives. And that is in the hearts of people. And in my heart. Sitting here at the table tonight makes me realize that. We’ve been losing our focus lately because of the opposition. We’ve been fighting with each other and forgetting the heart of it, I think. I’m glad I told you about those first days and my reasons for following him. It makes the silly argument some of us got into tonight about who would be the greatest in the kingdom seem....embarrassing, and childish.

He just said one of us would betray him.....maybe we already have.

HYMN – to the tune of #562, Galilee

***As of old, St. Andrew heard it by the Galilean lake
Turned from home and toil and kindred leaving all for Jesus’ sake.***

“Money should no longer be first in my life, hate cannot be fought with hate.”

MATTHEW (LEVI)

I am Levi. One thing I can tell you is that I’m a different man today than I was three years ago. I can tell you that for sure. For years, I had a very important job in Capernaum, as a tax collector for the Romans. The Romans, as you may know, have a great appetite for money. Their army has to be supported, the officials have to live in grand style, roads have to be built and maintained, and for all that, they need that tax money. My office was on the main highway near the Sea of Galilee – it was the best place to get the taxes from both the ships and the caravans.

There are so many taxes....too many by far. It feels as though there’s a tax on breathing! It’s not as though the money went to improve our lives....that kind of tax is a good thing. But the Roman taxes go to support the very army that holds us captive! I know you’re wondering how I could have taken that job – collecting taxes from the poor to support the violence and the luxury of the rich – and from my own people! Well....when you need a job, I guess you don’t ask too many questions about anything else, and so I took the job, prepared to pay the price. And what a price I paid! Our people HATE tax collectors. Traitors to our own people, they say. And I was a hated man. And money is a poor comfort when you don’t have any friends. I was lonely. Really lonely.

I used to watch Jesus and his friends go by, watching from my window. They seemed....happy, and close to each other. I longed to belong; wondered what it would be like to have people to laugh and talk with like that. Other times I hated them – “I’m just fine on my own” I’d say to myself.

Once, they stopped near enough for me to hear what he said. I saw the suffering people who came for a touch or a word of comfort, and I saw the kindness with which Jesus treated them. He didn’t turn anyone away! And I wondered if he’d treat ME as kindly.

Not long afterwards, Jesus came to the doorway of my office. "I've been watching you" he said. "Your life is a miserable one. I can see in your eyes that you long for something more. You are hated by your own people, but trust me Levi, nothing will be gained by returning hate for hate. Follow me, and I promise you a happier life"

I couldn't believe it! Without hesitation, I went with him. "Come to my house for dinner" I said, not really believing he would come. But he did! So did the rest, even though I could feel their disapproval. It was one of the best days of my life – no one had ever come to my home before. No one would sit and eat with me. I made a huge feast. And Jesus gave me a new name – you know me as Matthew, which means "gift of God". Imagine ME – a gift from God! It changed me. It let me see myself in a new way. That's what Jesus is like you know. He looks deeper than the surface. He knew my loneliness, and my need to be understood. And he held out a way of life that was more – so much more.

I've been writing down some of what Jesus says and teaches. That's one thing I can do that not many of the followers can. I don't know what I'll do with my writing, but it seems important to do it. Just today, I wrote down something that seemed particularly important. "Seek first the kingdom of God, and the rest will be added unto you." I'm glad I wrote that down. Maybe someday others will profit from it as much as I have.

HYMN VU 356

***Seek ye first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you.
Hallelu, halleluia***

"There must be a confrontation – a crisis."

JUDAS

Judas. Judas, son of Iscariot. Look at him. Doesn't it just make your heart ache for him? Look at the pain in his face. What is going through his mind right now? Judas isn't only what you have heard. He, like all of us, has a mother, a father, and many more things going on inside him than we know.

He comes from a family of merchants, and has a lot of experience with finances. So it is that Jesus asked him to be the treasurer for what meagre finances we have among us as we follow him. He does a good job for us, but sometimes, he scolds us for giving so much of our money away to those in need. He says they wouldn't BE in need if they weren't so lazy. Sometimes, he's right, too, but Jesus says that even the lazy need food, and need to know someone cares.

Judas has become an outsider among us – almost all the rest of us are from Galilee, but he's from Judea. I think we're to blame somewhat too you know, because we were suspicious of him, and left him out of our confidence at first. We said to ourselves "Judas is a loner" but that was only partly true. I think he

could have been different if we had been more welcoming. But that's water under the bridge right now, I guess. Still...I wonder how things might have been different if....and who really is to blame.

So here he is, as you see him today. A tortured man. You can see it. Why did he follow Jesus to begin with? We'll never know the depths of his heart – what need, what hopes does he have that make him follow Jesus even now.



I do know that when Jesus became so popular, Judas thought we should take advantage of that – get Jesus elected - make him a national leader, and really make a difference in this country. He was so disappointed when Jesus refused to do that. Judas sees Jesus as short-sighted, and I heard him talking to some people from the temple just the other day. I'm not sure what he has in mind, but he seems to be trying to make a decision. And from the look on his face, it's a very important one.

I think that HE thinks, that if Jesus is pushed to the wall, he'll come out fighting and take his rightful place as King of Israel.

Judas sees Jesus as a dreamer – and I think he wants to jolt him back into reality. He has often said that all of us are blind, and that all this talk of peace and love is meaningless if we are not in a position to change things – positions of power. He thinks that if Jesus' life were really in danger, we'd all have to see that.

I feel for him – I really do. What a place to be in! Torn between your friend and your hopes for a better life for your country.

Earlier just tonight, here at the table, Jesus said that one of us would betray him. I'll never forget the look that passed between Judas and Jesus at that moment.

Wait (Judas leaves)

Judas don't go – Jesus' love is for you too – don't go.....

Silence

“Show us the Father.”

PHILIP

As you may know, I’m Philip and I’m originally from Bethsaida, in Galilee. I have a Greek heritage; my ancestors were from that part of the world. When I was a boy in Bethsaida, I used to play with Simon and Andrew and help out with the boats. They’re the first ones who told me about Jesus. I didn’t pay any attention at first, but soon, so many others were talking about this man Jesus; this rabbi and the marvellous things he was doing – I got more and more interested.

When I finally met Jesus, he seemed to me an...interesting man. A powerful orator. We Greeks always want to know the reasons and the explanations for everything, and I found myself wanting to know what made this man tick. What was the source of his personality, his power?

There had been many so called magicians around our parts with tricks to fool us. Even several false Messiahs. So what made this guy different? I set out to find out. For months, I travelled with Jesus, and the rest of them. I saw the lame walk. I saw the blind see again. I heard the teacher tell parables that made people say “yes, that’s true, why didn’t I think of that before?” Soon, I was convinced that Jesus was no mere magician. He was too quiet, too unassuming for that. He wasn’t after money or fame; he was no show-off. In fact, he often told those he had helped not to tell anyone what had happened.\

What Jesus did have, I saw, was an extraordinary ability to see beneath the surface – to see what is hidden from others. In the law, in the country, and in people themselves. Once, a frail woman pushed through the crowd behind Jesus and barely touched his garment. He turned at once and said “your faith has made you whole”.

I was with the teacher one day when some 5000 people gathered to hear him talk. When it came near the evening mealtime, Jesus asked me: “how will we feed all these people?” They had been there all day without eating. I replied: “I don’t know! It would take a lot of money to give them each just a bit”. But just then, Andrew brought along a young boy who had five barley loaves and two dried fish which he was willing to give. Jesus fed all of us that day with it! We even had 12 baskets full left over. There really is something fantastic about this man. What makes him the person he is? Jesus often talks about God in such intimate terms – like a loving parent. “Daddy” he calls God, and spoke of the Holy One as a mother hen. I notice too that Jesus spends a lot of time in prayer. Is this the source of his power?

Tonight, Jesus said that one of us would betray him. I feel sick....does he mean me? I keep wanting proof, I keep needing to see, I keep asking questions – is this a kind of betrayal? What do you think – is it me? When he speaks of his betrayer – is that me?

HYMN VU 371

***Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth though hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key***

*That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine!*

“Even if I am tempted as many as three times, I will not desert him.”

SIMON PETER

I am Simon, Andrew’s brother. We used to fish for a living, but I guess you know that already. It was my brother Andrew who first told me about Jesus. That’s Andrew’s greatest gift, you know – he’s not shy at all to tell everyone he knows to come and see Jesus. It’s easy to get caught up in my little brother’s enthusiasm.

I’m someone who has always been - “impulsive” I guess you’d call me. Andrew said “come and see” and – I just went. I was impressed that this Jesus turned out to be our age, and a local boy, like us. I could relate to him right away. He had a young, active body, and a confident voice – I like people like that. I felt right away that Jesus knew what he was talking about - he knew his business, not all talk like some of those city big wigs, you know? Yes, he knew his business. And that business turned out to be preaching and touching people with God’s love. I was so impressed by the ways Jesus could reach people and let them know how much God loves them....I had never heard God talked about in that way before. Like....a friend.

And Jesus had a way with words. Often the Pharisees and others would debate with him, the way rabbis do with each other. I made me laugh to hear how well Jesus knew the scriptures and how he read them as though they were a living thing; how easily and gently he could make his point. Often I’d get angry if someone challenged him; I’d reach for my sword. But Jesus would just give me that look, and I’d put it away again. It’s something I’m working on, sometimes with more success than others.

Once, Jesus spoke harshly to me – it was a terrible moment. Jesus had been teaching that he would DIE! – Well none of us believes that ‘s going to happen – surely God won’t LET that happen! As usual, I spoke before I thought, but honestly I was just saying what the others were thinking. “That can’t be,!” I said “You are of God, and God is all powerful! This cannot happen to you!”

Jesus, for the first time since I knew him, responded with anger. He said “Get behind me, Satan. Do not tempt me!” I was crushed. Horrified. Even ...angry. Looking back on it I think that maybe Jesus was angry because....because he himself was tempted to think as I did and didn’t like to hear his own weakness echoed in someone else’s words. I’m like that myself – maybe you are too.

Lately, I’m noticing that the crowds following us have becoming thinner these days. Many are disappointed that Jesus refuses to take a more public role.

That must have been on Jesus’ mind when one day not long ago we were walking along and he asked us “Who do people say that I am?” and then “What about you? Who do YOU say that I am?” Most of us

were uncertain how to answer – but...you guessed it. I spoke up right away. “you are the Christ, the son of the living God”. Jesus’ face lit up. “And you, Simon, are a rock. From now on you will be called Peter” Those words took all the sting out of having been called Satan. And I’ve been known as Peter ever since. And, like a rock, I will be strong and true to Jesus even now. Things are getting scary out there, but I will stick by Jesus to the end. Even though others may turn away, I never will. Not even if I am tempted as many as three times. I’ll never forsake my friend. Ever.

HYMN VU 144

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (repeat)

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

“I hope it was a parable”

JAMES

I’m James, son of Zebedee. I’m another of those fishing folk; we earn our living on the water...used to anyway. We had a little business; my brother John, and our parents. Jesus calls both John and me “sons of thunder” – it’s because of what happened one day. I’ll tell you about that, but since he gave us that nickname, I’ve been trying to live it down. So far it hasn’t worked.

It happened while Jesus and all of us were going to Jerusalem to the temple. We had cut through the province of Samaria instead of going around as we usually did, because we were in a hurry. Nightfall caught us at a little Samaritan village. We asked for lodging and were told there was none. (Jesus was used to that!)

We asked for food – their kitchens were empty. So they said. No even when Judas opened his moneybag would these cursed Samaritans help us! So...we had to trudge on through the dusk. Thomas said that we had made a mistake in telling them we were going to Jerusalem to worship, because, he said, the Samaritans have their own temple and will not worship in Jerusalem, nor trust anyone who does.

John and I were furious! All of us were tired. We had walked a long time that day. Besides, it was a great insult to refuse food and shelter to any traveller. That’s the way of our people. So I, (no one ever could accuse me of being subtle) I said to Jesus: “Lord, let us call down fire from heaven on them and destroy this miserable town! Look what they have done to you!”

Jesus looked both stern, and a bit amused. “You don’t know what you are asking” he said. “I didn’t come to destroy, but to save”. Then he added “You two brothers are as fierce and quick as thunder and lightning.” And so, “sons of thunder” we became.

Since then I've tried very hard to keep my temper down to a dull roar. Perhaps some of you are quick tempered too, and know how hard that can be. I've done pretty well even if I do say so myself. But I get SO ANGRY sometimes with people who don't treat Jesus well. They keep on trying to trap him.

Once, they asked Him why he picked fruit and grain to eat on the Sabbath. Jesus answered mildly, but to the point. He gave the example of King David, who ate bread when he was hungry. IN the background, I was seething: I said "tell them, Master...tell them we picked that fruit and grain because we were hungry and have no other food. Tell them too that fool with an ounce of sense would know that, unless their brain cells were dulled by the huge meal they just ate, while others starve". If the Pharisees heard me, they ignored me....I know I shouldn't have said it but I just couldn't help it. Jesus is always so patient when people ask dull questions. He often answers with another question too – or with a parable that makes us think harder than ever before.

I wonder about the parables....they confuse me. Sometimes I can't tell when Jesus is using a parable and when he means something literally. Like.....Jesus said just tonight that one of us would betray him. A few days ago, he said that he would die and then rise again. Was this a parable? Is there some hidden meaning? Does he really mean it? This son of thunder waits now to learn the answer. So do we all.

HYMN VU 563

***Jesus, you have come to the lakeshore
Looking neither for wealthy or wise ones'
You only asked me to follow humbly.***

***O Jesus, with your eyes you have searched me,
And while smiling, have spoken my name;
Now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
By your side I will seek other seas***

"The one who would be the greatest must be servant of all. Some day I hope to understand."

JOHN

I'm John – James' brother. We're almost always together; have been since we were boys. That kind of closeness in brothers is rare, they tell us. I do know it's not the experience of everyone in our group, that's for sure. But for us, for James and me, we're very close, and I'm thankful for that.

I think you know part of our story at least. One day as we were drying our nets, Jesus came and called Andrew, then Simon, asking them to follow. We were there too – and we watched in amazement as Simon and Andrew turned, left their nets, and walked up the beach to join the rabbi! I was even more

amazed when Jesus turned to US and said “come, I need you too.”. We stared at each other, and finally I said “come on, let’s go and at least see what it’s about. Our boat is safe here and we have some time” That was the most important decision of my life. For months now we’ve followed this man, listened to his words, watched with excitement and awe, at how his love and his passion for serving God have drawn so many followers to him.



You might think it strange that Jesus should choose people like my brother and me. It’s not so strange, really. When the people pushed and shoved to get close to him, he really needed us then. Sometimes we locked arms to hold the crowds back if we thought there were people who wanted to hurt him. You might call us bouncers, in your world.

Our parents haven’t always approved of our choice to follow Jesus. I admit I’ve neglected the fishing. Mom and dad can do alright on their own, but they are getting older, and James and I are expected to do our part in the family business. And they worry, I know they do. It was worry that caused our mother to come to Jesus one day and say “Lord please let my sons sit at your right hand and your left hand when you come into your glory.” Well, some of our group overheard that and laughed – imagine having your mother come and say that in front of everyone! I was embarrassed. I could feel my ears get hot and I knew that even through my sunburned skin they could see me getting red. I just hung my head – I didn’t know what to do. Others didn’t laugh though – they got angry. What right did SHE have, they said, to ask that HER sons be given honoured positions?

Jesus, though, seemed to understand her. He said to her: “This is something over which I have no control. Only God can do that.” Then he turned to us; to James and me, and asked a really strange question: “Is this your desire also? You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am about to drink?” I didn’t understand what he meant. But I DID understand that I was thankful to the teacher for being kind to our mom, and so I answered “we can and we will”.

Some of the others were still angry though - muttering, “who do they think they are anyway?”. Jesus spoke to all of us then. “You are behaving like children” he scolded us. “You are all valuable to me. But let me tell you, whoever wants to be greatest among you must be the servant of all”. We stared at each other then, blinking with doubt. We have remembered those words since, and others like them. He said once “Love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you”.

I have to say that I don’t understand completely yet, but here at this table tonight, I know that I love this man, my teacher, my friend, and some day I hope I truly find out what it means to be servant of all.

HYMN VU 595

***Brother, let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.***

“I wonder what Jesus meant that one of us would betray him?”

THOMAS

My name is Thomas. I was a carpenter once – still do a bit of that work from time to time, when we need some ready cash. I love it too, and you know, I think now that having that occupation in common with Jesus made me feel closer to him in the beginning. We both love the smell of the wood and the rasp of the saw and the feel of fresh wood shavings. Sometimes at night around a campfire we end up talking about the best way to make a table or sharpen a saw. Jesus is – he’s a smart man in lots of ways.



I guess you could say I’m a practical kind of guy. You have to be, as a carpenter. When you’re choosing the right lumber for a chair, you have to be realistic, be able to price it to make a profit. And right now, here at this table, I’m thinking practical thoughts as I look at my friend Jesus and try to figure out what is happening.

I can see there is a growing criticism of him from the crowds, and from some of us here at this table. I can see that. The crowds who used to follow us are thinning out. It’s been discouraging.

When I joined Jesus, he was a popular hero. And I, like the rest of them, followed Jesus on that crest of popularity. Now – the waves we ride are angry and rough. It’s frightening. II don’t know what to do to make it right.

After Jesus fed all those people that day, the crowds were ready to make him King. Now, they’re calling him a friend of sinners...and even a blasphemer. There are few of us left who are faithful....I can see that. Even looking around this table, we can’t be sure of the support of everyone.

When Jesus decided to come to Jerusalem this time, I was hesitant and afraid. It seemed as though we were walking into a lion’s den. Inviting trouble. Still, I didn’t want to openly oppose Jesus – he must know what he’s doing....he’d made this decision after much prayer and thought. We could all see that. WE all hemmed and hawed and then I got sick of our wishy-washiness and said straight out “let’s go with him – even to die, if need be”.

They were all shocked – to hear that coming from good old practical me. But here we are. And that’s how I still feel. I’m not sorry I said that, but....

It’s getting frightening out there. And Jesus has just said that one of US will betray him. We all looked at each other and said “who???”

I can tell you, when someone says something like what Jesus just said, it brings out all the old insecurities in all of us, and all the old suspicions of each other. It was quite a moment.

Me? I didn't say anything at all. I'm just thinking....I wonder how this is going to turn out? Sometimes I wish it had been a carpenter who had made the world. Then it would be straight and strong and easily understood. Well.. it's not, and here I stand.....

Pray for all of us will you? There are ugly things here at this table....some of them are in me.

HYMN VU 560

***O Master, let me walk with thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Teach me thy secret, help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.***