

**Maundy Thursday 2021, Maldon : 'Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's Death until he comes', 1 Corinthians 11 v 26.'**

What was Jesus trying to do at the Last Supper? Let us consider the Passover. Here are some words that the head of the family is supposed to say at it, even today:

Firstly, 'Do not say that **our ancestors** were set free from the Land of Egypt, say that **we** were set free from the Land of Egypt.' This is about now and here and us, and not just about then and there and them.

Secondly:

'We have dedicated this festival tonight to the dream and the hope of freedom, the dream and the hope that have filled human hearts from the time our Israelite ancestors went forth out of Egypt..... But the freedom we strive for means more than broken chains. It means liberation from all those enslavements that warp the spirit and blight the mind, that destroy the soul even when they leave the flesh alive. We can be enslaved to ourselves, when laziness or cowardice keeps us from doing what we know to be right.... We can be enslaved by poverty and inequality; when the fear of need drives us to dishonesty and violence, to defending the guilty and accusing the innocent; Passover calls on us to put an end to **all** slavery. Passover calls out in the name of God, '**let my people go.**'

Was the Last Supper, then, a Passover meal? Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that it was: 'Go into the city, to a certain man and say to him, 'my time is near, I will keep the Passover at your house', they say. John tells us that the Last Supper is not a Passover. For John, the Last Supper is the night before the Passover. For dramatic purposes, he needs the Passover to be not on Thursday but on Friday. Jesus is killed at exactly the same moment that the Passover lambs in the Temple are killed – because he himself is the true Passover lamb, the one who takes away the sins of the world, who sets us free from living in a way that is deathly. This endless sacrificing of animals is now obsolete. Jesus has liberated life to happen. But has he?

We had a discussion at the Encounter Group last Thursday. It was not about the Passover and the Last Supper, but the issues are similar. Father John told us that Jesus has made the Jewish Law unnecessary because he has poured his spirit into our hearts. Doing good is now our second nature. It is no longer a bore, if you like. On the other hand, Jack was still keen on the 10 commandments. Mike Robinson, well known for being a terrible father, has not even found it necessary, to teach the 10 commandments to his children. Ruth O'Neill said, and these are my words and not hers, 'if Jesus has set us free; if we feed on his body and blood; if his spirit fills our hearts, if everyone shall know that we are his disciples because we love one another, why is it that we do not look more Christian? What is the evidence that we are saved? That we are no longer addicted, no longer frightened? That we are joyful, kind, good and just. Like all of Ruth's' questions, this was a good one. I would say to Ruth that there is a lot of evidence. But clearly not enough. What of Christian intolerance, warmongering and bigotry. Christian small mindedness is alive and well in churches up and down the land. Then Mike Bentley threw a brick in. he told us that he preferred the Old Testament to the New. This is an ad. Why not come to Encounter on Thursday nights and throw your bricks in? It is bracing.

But now I am going to mediate between Father John and Ruth:

What if Father John is right? We do not need the Law. Jesus has taken away all our evil on the Cross and left us free. He is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. For heaven's sake, we sing that every time we come to Mass. We must believe it to be true.

But now I come to the nub of my argument. What if the gospel is true, but that it is very rarely truly practised? Gandhi was asked what he thought of Western civilisation. He said he thought it would be a good idea. Some versions of the story say he was asked what he thought of Christianity – same answer – it would be a good idea. Our type of Christianity, Anglicanism, has always been muddled with something else – firstly kings and queens, Henry V111 and Elizabeth 1. Then the Empire, the missionaries following the conquerors, then state religion, and then the public school. In the future none of this is going to be possible. In the future the only thing that is going to be left to us will be our faith, and Jesus. Who, then, will we be?

When Paul gives his account of what is happening at the Last Supper, he says, 'as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's Death until he comes.' The orientation is to the past – 'the Lords' death', but even more to the future – 'till he comes'.

Welcome, everyone, to the future. 'Next year in Jerusalem', say the Jews at Passover. Have you noticed that the whole of the New Testament is about the future? The atmosphere of every page is, 'Be ready. Something is about to happen.' It is all really tense. Just as the Jews were told 'eat this meal as if you are ready to get out quickly.' Shame we have made it a book to snooze over.

What is this 'something is about to happen' that infuses the atmosphere when there are people around who live by the Spirit? But going back to Gandhi's 'I think it would be good idea'. Is not the gospel, Jesus, your true nature, St Mary's coming alive, always something that is just about to happen? That, at this very moment, is breaking from the bud? I would love to believe that people can see in me and us, the unexpected, the unknown, the just about to be. There are people who when they walk into a room, there is an air of expectancy, because they have come in. I would like us to be that kind of people. There is an expression 'living the future now'. This expression rescues Heaven and the Second Coming and The Kingdom from the unreality of most funeral sermons.

Justice and peace have nowhere near arrived on earth. Poverty is not ended. Racism lives. But supposing where we are, where bread is broken and wine outpoured, justice and peace become imaginable because they are how we live, people will see in us, in our celebration of mass and our common life that the kingdom of Heaven has drawn close.

'Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' Amen.