

2024 03 24 – *Betrayal*

Scripture: Mark 14:12-26a (*The Inclusive Bible*)

In today's Palm Sunday service we are not only celebrating Jesus' palm waving entrance into Jerusalem, but also remembering some of the other events that led up to his crucifixion on Good Friday. One of those events was, of course, the celebration of the Passover meal which took place on the Thursday evening. It was, and still is, a very important celebration in the Jewish religion and Jesus made sure that a large spacious room and the traditional Passover feast would be ready for his disciples.

It was during this meal that Jesus took the bread and the cup and shared it with his disciples in much the same way that we do every time we celebrate communion. Communion, the Eucharist, Holy Mass, or the Lord's Supper, is a sacrament that has been celebrated by the Christian church since its earliest beginnings. It is even described in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, a letter that is thought to have been written only about 20 years after Jesus died (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

I just had the privilege of serving communion at Willow Creek Manor on Friday afternoon. After the service was over, one of the residents asked to speak to me. She said, "Before serving communion don't you ask if the participants have Jesus on their hearts?" I realized quickly that this woman was from a different denomination, one that required members of the congregation to be confirmed before they could celebrate communion.

This is not an unusual requirement, in fact, The United Church of Canada is probably one of the few denominations that celebrate communion with an open table. This has not always been the case. It was back in the 1980's that communion was opened to all seekers.

I can remember my parents telling me about the days when the elders had to deliver communion cards to everyone in the congregation who was confirmed. My dad explained that those visits were also a good opportunity for people to catch up on their givings. In some churches, it was only those with cards that were served communion the following Sunday morning. In others, the cards were turned in at Sunday service and became a useful record of attendance. If a person, lacking sufficient reason, was absent from communion for several years, the Session had the authority to remove them from the membership roll of the congregation. <https://pcheritagecentre.ca/collection/communion-tokens/>

There was even a time when the elders had the power to decide that a member was unworthy of receiving a communion card. They were given the authority to determine what kind of action or inaction would warrant that exclusion. I can't imagine having that responsibility and I am grateful that The United Church of Canada chose to move to an open table. In our *Song of Faith*, it says,

Carrying a vision of creation healed and restored,
we welcome all in the name of Christ.
Invited to the table where none shall go hungry,
we gather as Christ's guests and friends.

In holy communion

we are commissioned to feed as we have been fed,
forgive as we have been forgiven,
love as we have been loved.

The open table speaks of the shining promise
of barriers broken and creation healed.

Having an open table, I believe, is one way that we are following the lead of Jesus. Jesus was a man who was notorious for having the most open table of his day. He chose to eat with anyone and everyone who was interested in hearing the Good News of God's love. In Mark 2:16-17 we read:

When the religious scholars who belonged to the Pharisee sect, saw that [Jesus] was eating with tax collectors and sinners, they complained to the disciples, "Why does the Teacher eat with these people?"

Overhearing the remark, Jesus said to them, "People who are healthy don't need a doctor; sick ones do. I have come to call sinners, not the righteous."

What good news for all of us! I'm sure not one of us can claim to be without sin. I'm sure that none of us can claim that we have no reason to ask for forgiveness. We are all, no doubt, needing a stronger, closer connection to the Holy Mystery, the Essence of Love. We are the ones that Jesus is calling.

It was just before the sharing of the bread and cup in the upper room that Jesus said, "The truth is, one of you is about to betray me—one who is eating with me." The disciples were shocked by these words and all denied that it could possibly be them. But Judas Iscariot knew. He knew that had just made a deal with the chief priests. He knew that he had promised to betray his teacher and the priests had offered him money. Jesus also knew; and yet there he was sharing the

bread and the wine with all his disciples, including Judas. Jesus's table was so open that even his betrayer was present.

Of course there are so many ways that we can betray Jesus in our own lives:

- every time we hurt ourselves or another person;
- when we lie or cheat or take what isn't ours;
- when we see suffering and do nothing;
- when we forget to share what we have with others.

The list is endless and yet, no matter what form our betrayal takes, we know that we are welcome at Jesus' table. We know that we are welcome to share in the bread and the cup. We know that we are welcome to seek a deeper connection with the Holy Mystery, the Essence of Love. We know that Jesus is calling us to come and be part of God's kingdom of peace and justice for all.

Whenever we accept the bread and the cup of communion we are saying to God, "Yes, we know that we are loved and we doing our best to love in return. We are seeking. We are seeking to love you, to love ourselves and to love our neighbour."

Even when we know we have failed, even when we have betrayed ourselves, our neighbour and our God, we are welcome to the table because Sacred Love is unconditional and everlasting.

May we all find the grace that we need at this communion table.

May it be so. Amen.