

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday February 10th 2008 John 13:18-30

Different cultures act differently around the table. There are different understandings about meals and their importance. In the age of fast food and TV dinners it is easy to think of food as just food, but in many cultures table fellowship is at the centre of who you are. 'You are who you eat with'. The people you eat with are regarded as 'com-panions', and those outside are regarded as enemies. To spurn the table, to betray the one who offers you bread is very serious, particularly if your host has 'unshared nearness' to the Father. To spurn that host is to put oneself outside in the darkness.

Jesus knew that one of the twelve would betray Him. Knowing that does not mean that He found it easy. He didn't. He was troubled in spirit because Judas was one who had been included around the table. Jesus knew that this action would set in train the events that led to the Crucifixion. Jesus' grief was not a pretence, nor did He feign it to make out that He really was human after all. No, it was real and deep.

Jesus sees the darkness, the 'awful breach of hospitality'.

Jesus talks openly about the betrayal, and the disciples were at a loss to know which of them He meant. Judas was probably shocked at Jesus' openness and candour. And whether we think that Judas betrayed Jesus because of jealousy, or for the money, or because of disappointment with the way that Jesus' mission had turned out, he was at that point presented with a stark choice - either to carry on with this recklessness, or to renounce evil and beg forgiveness. Jesus is not asking for perfection, the issue is one of openness and responsiveness to the Word of God. Jesus offers him some bread, hoping that Judas will put aside his hatred, scorn, jealousy and receive the love. But Judas did not break down, he did not ask forgiveness, it hardened his resolve. Like sunshine, the heat will either harden the mud, or soften the butter. It all depends on your response. What it won't do is do nothing.

And Judas's response was to harden, at which point, as the climax as it were of years of resisting the love and grace of God, Satan entered him.

The darkness settles and reigns from chapter 13 onwards, until Easter morning. And though Judas meant it for evil, and put himself beyond the pale, and though his betrayal leads to the separation of Jesus from His Father, the cross is God's glory. This is the place where sins are taken away by the Lamb of God.

How do we respond to this revelation of the glory of Jesus in the Cross? Judas chose to live his life in the shadows; like many nowadays, he couldn't cope with the truth about the human condition. His deeds were evil. A person like this sees Jesus as a complete threat to the world they have built for themselves.

A Christian is not like that. He is someone who comes out from the shadows, who renounces darkness, who brings all they have said and done into the light of God's love, and finds themselves in the bosom of Jesus. John wants you to see yourself as His beloved.

So quit keeping score, commit yourself to God who sees you as His redeemed child. You have no other identity. 'The disciple whom Jesus loved' stands for everyone who leans into the bosom of Jesus. And as we do that and go out and meet people they will meet Jesus through us.