



Surely, Not I?

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Mark 8:24-25

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 2015

Just so we're clear, right from the beginning. This evening, this story, this meditation, isn't about us. Tonight, as always, at the center is God's love, embodied in Christ.

As we walk again through these events, and as we again enter this story, the layers of our human condition are exposed. Jesus is gathered with his closest friends, in a Passover celebration that is intimate and holy. Yet, in this circle, trust will be broken. He tells them that one of the twelve will betray him—one of the ones who had traipsed behind Jesus' heels, hanging on his words, grasping to understand what he understood about God's kingdom. One of them will betray him.

And we know what's coming. It's not just one, they will all fall away. Jesus knows what's coming and that he'll have to walk alone. But they don't know what is to come. They respond, "Surely, not I?"

How did they say these words? Indignantly? Knowing that it would never be them? Or despairingly, understanding that it could? We don't want it to be us. Just don't make me Judas. Not that one.

Parker Palmer has written a lot about the journey of our interior life, how we grow toward wholeness, how we find and make safe spaces with one another so that growth and transformation can happen. In *A Hidden Wholeness* he talks about the soul, saying, "Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places...it is tough and tenacious" (59).

Surely, in the days and weeks that follow, we see that tough and tenacious side of the soul. Even in all this, the relationship between Jesus and the disciples can be repaired. None of them, nor any of their souls, is defeated. We can keep going.

And at the same time, "the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come. But if we walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye—but the sight is a gift" (59).

Part of the invitation of this night is to get closer than we would like, and to pay attention to our soul. We don't really want to enter this room where Jesus says to his closest friends, "One of you will betray me." We don't want to see that in our own lives the relationships that are supposed to be safe aren't always.

Not our families, who are intended to stay by our side, to support us and help us grow into the people we were made to be. But families don't always help. Families can be abusive. They can be judgmental and diminishing.

Because sermons are prepared with an emphasis on verbal presentation, the written accounts may occasionally stray from proper grammar and punctuation.

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Not with our closest friends with whom we have shared our stories, and our secrets, and our fears. Friendship can be fractured. We sometimes turn our backs on one another.

Not even in marriage, the one family member that is optional, that we actually get to choose. One who promises to stay whatever may come, to be faithful. But sometimes we don't stay. Sometimes we aren't faithful.

If we accept the invitation of this night, to go there, and we are vulnerable, whom can we trust to hold our fragile, shy, and yet tenacious souls?

And the other side isn't any better; we don't want it to be us. We want to be faithful, we want to respond to God's perfect love perfectly in return. We hope that at least we can do this much. At least we can stay awake. At least we can say that we know him. At least we cannot let him be alone.

But then we remember again that this evening, this story, this meditation, isn't about us. It's about Christ, who gathers at a table with the ones he loves who still don't get it, the ones who will betray him and fall away, the ones who have heard and who need to hear again in a million different ways.

It's about Christ, who stands up at the table, and reinterprets the story of God's love and God's deliverance, who stands up and redefines the world. It's about one knows we'll be hurt, we'll be disappointed, but who sets the example to enter into relationships anyway.

One of my favorite moments in our baptism liturgy for little ones, as we name each one as a child of God and as we all remember that that's who we are, is when we address the one being baptized and say, "God did all this for you, little one, though you know nothing of it as yet." God isn't waiting for us to get it completely. As much as we don't want it to be us, sometimes it will be. Maybe, as hard as it is to let our shy souls enter that space and that story, maybe we bring that line with us, especially tonight when we come to the table. Christ is saying, "I did all this for you, little one. This table, my life, is for you."

It's for us, as intimately, and particularly, and as individually as possible. We are God's beloved. But, this wasn't for a you or a me; Christ is for us all and for the whole World. All are welcome here, to a place that is as different as any can be. A place that we can trust, a place that is safe for our soul. We get closer here than we can get anywhere else. We get a taste of what should be and what will be. We touch it and taste it.

Momma's busy in the kitchen. It's not quite ready yet. But oh, it smells good. With a wink she smiles and says, "Go on and have a taste, it's for you after all, for you all."

We come, welcomed by the only one who can do so perfectly, the one who knows our messy and our complicated lives, the one who says, "All this is for you, little one, this table and my life are for you."