

Holy Wednesday

From Psalm 70:

Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.
Let those who love your salvation say evermore, 'God is great!'
But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!

Prayer

God is great!
the world proclaims it
the universe sings of it
People speak love to each other
in the work of nurses and doctors
in the kindness of neighbours
in the diligence of the police
in the ordinary and the extraordinary
God's love is shown and has life
God is great!
bringing wholeness even in illness
bringing light or company in the darkness
bringing healing through suffering
bringing life through death
God is great!
Calling us to worship at this time and throughout our lives
Amen

**And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

**Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Methodist Church. Singing the Faith. Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

The story so far...

Yesterday we ended with the words of Jesus that the command of the Father is eternal life. These last chapters of John's Gospel echo with life, light and promise but they also throb with darkness and threat. If this were a film, the tension in the music would have been increasing since the raising of Lazarus and before and the lighting would have darkened with storm clouds gathering overhead.

For today and tomorrow we sit at the dinner table with Jesus and his disciples and overhear the conversation. In John's Gospel this is a huge section of teaching which contains passage many of us will know and love

"My peace I give to you..."

"I am the vine..."

and much more besides. They bear much reading and reflection.

Today, however, we will reflect on two of the disciples and their actions which are predicted here. Tomorrow we will jump to the meal's beginning and to its end. But now we join the disciples and Jesus around the table as they eat and drink.

John 13:1-38

Another meal table
the air is heavy
laden with the smells of food
the fear of the future
The cries and hopes of the crowd
of freedom & God's kingdom echo
the cries and hopes
the laughter and longing
of three years of travel
hang in folds billowing around us
reverberating within us

In the middle of it all he sits
surrounded by friends
joining in the banter and jokes
yet increasingly distant and different
as if he has already left,
or made his mind up to go.

Suddenly a blow so great
the dish almost falls from my hand
I stumble as if I've been stabbed
brought down by his words
the room draws in
dead
still
darkness outside closing in on us
How could he think that?
How could any of us betray him?
How could Peter deny him?
Judas slides out
absorbed by the dark
my heart sinks
it could none of us
it could be any of us

The Passover table is set, the story of God's salvation being told in Jesus's words and actions as well as in the meal itself: wine and bread speak of God's blessing and abundance; bitter herbs cry of the presence and love of God when times are hard and all seems lost; the meat a reminder of sacrifice and need.

Darkness surrounds the room, seeping in at doorways and windows. Yet the light of God is still with them showing the way. But also saying goodbye and showing the future.

The friends sit together, united, bound by their common experiences of the last few years on the road, knowing each other intimately.

Jesus's words must have shaken them. They must have seemed unthinkable first one disciple and then another would turn away and leave the light, one permanently, the other temporarily. If Peter could fall then so could any of them, so could any of us. Judas immediately leaves the light, darkness filling and enfolding him. Peter will close his eyes

to the light later for a brief time when the shelter of an artificial fire seems preferable to the true light and where it leads.

What about us and our call to live in the light?

Can we love and be loved as God has loved us?

The words that follow give us hope:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid”

Be still and know that I am God...

I am the Lord that healeth thee...

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust....

Anonymous Based on Psalm 46:10–11

Methodist Church. Singing the Faith Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Prayers

Be still

know God’s presence

in the stillness of our quiet streets

and in the business of hospital wards

in queues for shops

in the worry about money and food

and solitary walks

in the longing for all to be well

and in the cries of grief

Be still for God is with you

Be still and know

the light of God’s life and love

Hold all those who are in need in that light

remember

the grieving and the dying

the hoping and the despairing

those working and those exhausted

and know that God is there before you

holding them,

loving them

with them no matter what

Be still and trust

that God’s love fills and holds

our isolation

our hospital wards

our foodbanks and shops

all that is held in God’s love

all that will be found its home in God’s love

Be still
know
trust
for God is with us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

**Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
when other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me.**

**Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see;
O thou who changest not, abide with me!**

**I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.**

*Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)
Methodist Church. Singing the Faith (Kindle Locations 4580-4601). Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.*