

After the astonishing event of washing his disciples' feet, Jesus resumed the meal which we know was the Last Supper. Then occurs an incident which is only recorded in John's Gospel. Jesus had a brief conversation with two very opposite disciples. First Jesus spoke to the one whom John's gospel describes him as 'the one Jesus specially loved.' Then he also spoke to Judas Iscariot, a conversation which none of the other disciples (apart from the beloved disciple of Jesus) had any clue what it was about.

So let us find out Jesus' relationship with these two disciples. The picture we have about the beloved disciple is a young lad. He had looked up to Jesus with admiration all his life, had followed him with joy and devotion. Very likely he was the youngest among Jesus' disciples, possibly a late teenage lad. If we accept the view that he is John the son of Zebedee, then he may have been a cousin of Jesus on his mother's side, and the reciprocal affection is quite natural.

It was because of their special relationship that the beloved disciple was able to ask Jesus the question the others all wanted to ask. Let us settle it once for all, the famous picture of the Last Supper by De Vinci isn't correct. None of them would have been sitting at all. Jesus and his disciples would be reclining on couches as a symbol of freedom. Free people reclined to eat, only slaves sat or stood. So naturally the beloved disciple was reclining close beside Jesus. Let us imagine he whispered to Jesus and He whispered back. It is in such intimate friendship that we, as readers, also find out that a close friendship was betrayed. What an irony. These two disciples represent the great divide of humankind. Either we are receiving the light or we are clinging to darkness.

John's Gospel tells us, the eleven other disciples around the table didn't know who was to betray Jesus. Judas was just one of them.

If the other disciples had known that Judas was about to betray Jesus, do you think they would have allowed him to go out so easily? Luke's Gospel tells us there were two swords in the upper room, one of which Peter was to wield so disastrously when they were at the Garden of Gethsemane. One wonders what was in the minds of Jesus, the beloved disciple and Judas.

The musical play *Jesus Christ Superstar* seems to give the impression that it was Jesus who forced Judas to betray him. Does this view stand to scrutiny? Jesus had just washed the disciples' feet, including Judas'. One wonders how Judas would have felt when Jesus washed his feet! Now, as they celebrated the Passover meal, Jesus did something quite special to Judas. Dipping a piece of bread in the dish and passing it to someone was a sign of special friendship. That was the sign Jesus employed to tell the beloved disciple, not only that it was Judas who was about to betray him, but what that deed would mean. It was a betrayal of intimate close trust and friendship. John the Evangelist has already told us that the devil had put the idea into Judas' mind to betray Jesus. Now he tells us that when Jesus gave Judas the bread, that Satan entered into him.

There are two issues we have to settle here. First, it does not mean that Judas was demon-possessed as in the other persons we come across in the Gospels. If that had been the case, surely Jesus would have done the same thing, that is, he would have cast the evil spirit out of Judas.

Second, from time to time we hear people trying to defend Judas, claiming that it was unfair that God should have chosen him to be the culprit to betray Jesus, condemning him to death.

Now if we say that it is God's eternal plan that Judas should be the person who would betray Jesus, I think we misunderstand the whole idea of God's predestination. That Judas will be like anyone of us who faces God's final judgment; I have no doubt about it. But if we say God in his eternal plan and decreed that Judas should be the evil one who betrayed Jesus, then I think we face enormous difficulty to understand God's creation: God saw that everything was so good. How could that be if at the back of God's mind there was something or someone evil?

In our understanding of predestination, what we can say affirmatively is this: predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God. Furthermore, the doctrine of predestination is never about any named individual's election. God's decree is to save those chosen in Christ. There will be a company of redeemed gathered around Christ the Representative: 'All that the Father gives me will come to me', Jesus said in John 6.37. Who they will be is not specified before the foundation of the earth. From this understanding of predestination to life, we can draw an analogical conclusion; God has not foreordained Judas to be the one who betrayed Jesus.

Judas' role in the salvation plan is just like Pharaoh in the story of Exodus. Paul in Romans 9 explains that the 'hardening' of Pharaoh had a purpose: 'to make known (God's) might and make known the wealth of his glory on the vessels of mercy' (9.23). John's Gospel has informed us the lifting up of Jesus will

be the greatest glory God ever shows to the world. The unbelieving Judas is not foreordained by God, but in the course of history his appearance serves in God's providence, a revelatory purpose. It enables the watching world to come to know and believe Jesus is the saviour of the world.

From these two points we can therefore appreciate John's description of the companionship of Judas and Satan. It was Judas who decided to join the forces of darkness to bring down Jesus, the messenger of the light. The confrontation between light and darkness, which we have been warned right at the beginning of the story, is coming to its climax. Judas has been willingly enlisted among the forces of darkness. As a story teller, John is a very skillful master. He wrote, when Judas went out of the upper room: 'It was night.' What does it mean? Judas disappears into it. Perhaps lost forever.

This episode presents us a picture of Jesus flanked by two opposite disciples, one with mutual love, the other betrayal, that is, one believing, the other unbelieving. As long as the Gospel is proclaimed, the reality will always be like this. Either we are drawn by the undying love of Jesus or we are drawn by the forces of darkness to put him down.

At the beginning of the episode we read that Jesus is troubled in spirit. Jesus looks at each one of us as beloved; he really wants our friendship with him deepening. Yet he knows he will get hurt by us, by our unbelief and betrayal. This episode reminds us that, every time after listening to the Gospel story, we have to ask ourselves, 'which side you are with Jesus?'