

Sunday, 3rd April 2022

Chronicles 35, 1 – 6 and 10 – 16

Luke 22, 1 – 13

Hello, good morning or afternoon or evening, whenever and wherever you are following this service, it is great to have you as part of our worshipping community.

We are now in the middle of what is called “passion-tide” which is the name given to the second half of Lent where the focus is on the suffering of Jesus. The pace of the story is getting faster and moves quickly to the climax of Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The reading from Chronicles 35 has shown us that the *Passover Meal* is at the centre of Judaism. It is what gives identity to the Jews, and explains their purpose by setting them in a relationship with God. This idea is developed in the Gospels, with Jesus reinterpreting the Passover. However, the Gospel commonly called “Luke” does not present us with a theology but tells a story.

The Pharisees are taking matters into their own hands. They want to act decisively and yet are afraid of the reaction they might receive from the people. That’s why they plan to proceed in secret, trying to find a way to kill Jesus without the people noticing at first.

In verse 3 we are told that “Satan” entered Judas. Satan is the name of the enemy, the opponent of God and Jesus. He, Satan, takes over. We might think, well this happened to Judas, it won’t happen to us. We are loyal and committed in our belief. But this kind of thinking could be the beginning. It is in a way arrogant and leaves us particularly vulnerable. I don’t think Judas had thought that he would become an instrument of Satan. After all, he had been one of the disciples, had been in close contact with Jesus, had received the best teaching and life-coaching that is available.

A few years ago, at college one of my colleagues made a very vulgar and offensive joke about Jesus and instead of having some good repost, I kept quiet and it was another colleague who actually said something although not being a believer herself. This incident is so clearly in my memory because the more I am thinking about it, the more it feels that I betrayed Jesus through my inaction.

Judas is now looking for a way to betray Jesus, again planning to act when out of the public eye. It seems to be a quality, characteristic of Satan, that wants to stay in the shadows and keep those on his side in the shadows, too. The followers of Jesus, though, are not afraid of the light. Not that we are meant to court publicity for its own sake but need to be aware when we are more content to remain on the side lines.

Example

Jesus gives detailed instructions to Peter and John where to find the right location for them to celebrate the Passover.

He also gives them instructions on what to prepare. In a way, Jesus counter-acts the plan of the Pharisees. Now it is known where he is going to celebrate the Passover – the owner of the upper room knows and we can imagine that he might tell others who has taken his room for the evening. In that way it is not a secret location where the Pharisees and their helpers can strike.

What we see in this passage as in the rest of the story is that Jesus uses tradition but gives it a new interpretation. There are references to the Exodus (the time when the Israelites fled out of Egypt to escape the slavery under pharaoh. Now we can see Jesus’ exodus. It is not an escape from the

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slavery under the Egyptians but an escape from the slavery to the power of evil. Jesus himself takes on the fight with Satan and his death on the cross enables us to escape from evil.

Later, during holy week we see how Jesus reinterprets the Passover meal into what is now celebrated by Christians as Holy Communion or the Eucharist. It draws us into salvation and healing, gives us the close personal relationship with Jesus which characterises Christian faith. The powers of evil might still rage around us but they are defeated. Just like Pharaoh's army still raced after the Israelites during the night of the first exodus, but no matter how angry and determined they were, they were stopped at the Red Sea and were thus defeated.

When we look at the events of passion-tide, the second half of Lent, we engage with the suffering and tragedy of Jesus but do so in the knowledge that ultimately He has won and that He is the risen Christ, triumphant and reigning in glory.