

## Maundy Thursday Luke 22:7-20 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Hello and welcome to my sermon at home for Maundy Thursday.

The passage I am basing this talk on is Luke 22:7-20:

In Romans Paul wrote that “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose<sup>1</sup>” I am not going to suggest in any way that God sent the Coronavirus pandemic – but we sometimes need reminding that even in the worst of situations God will use it as an opportunity to bring new riches to our life. As we struggle to adapt to not having our church buildings – especially at the time heading into Easter - it gives us a chance to reflect on whether we could have a better understanding of the purpose of the building and its place in our walk with God.

In the Gospel of Luke there is a Greek word that he only uses twice (we would pronounce it Kataluma) The first time we come across it is right at the beginning of the Gospel when Luke tells us Mary laid the baby Jesus in a manger because there was no room in the Kataluma. Traditionally that word has been translated as “Inn” but it really means upper – or guest – room. (*Please be patient with me there is a long time until Christmas by which time we can go back to talking about an inn etc.*) The picture Luke paints for us is of a busy Palestinian household in a typical house where people slept

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version—Anglicised](#). (1984). (electronic edition., Ro 8:28). London: Hodder & Stoughton.

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upstairs and did most of their general living downstairs. In the evening the animals would be brought in for the night as people went to bed. When Mary went into labour the house was too full after the birth so they put Jesus in the feeding trough – or manger - downstairs. When God chose to come to the world he didn't choose a palace, nor a religious building, nor somewhere discreet – he came smack bang into the middle of ordinary everyday life. Repeatedly throughout his ministry Jesus was criticised for being with outcasts, lepers, tax collectors and sinners and not with the religiously respectable. He made the ordinary sacred by bringing the kingdom of God to them.

At the beginning of his life, there was no room for Jesus in the Kataluma in Bethlehem. The second time Luke uses this word is in our Gospel reading and this time there was room for Jesus in the Kataluma (upper room) which was prepared especially for him and his disciples. It was here, using the ordinary items from the Passover meal of bread and wine, that he gave us the special gift of remembering what he had done and who that has made us - in what we now call Communion.

I wonder if you have ever noticed the element of farce in this. Jesus was in Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish faith.

Overshadowing everything was the temple which was the heart of the Jewish religious life. Elaborate rituals were used by all who entered to make sure they were holy enough to come closer to God – only certain people were allowed to get closer to the centre and, right at the centre, was the holy of

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holies where it was believed God dwelt – and into which only high priest was allowed each year. Whilst all this ritual was going on, God himself wasn't there – he was in the kataluma of an ordinary house taking the role, not here of Priest but of the head of the household, celebrating the Passover meal with his followers and instituting the sharing of bread and wine that has remained at the heart of Christian worship ever since.

Throughout his ministry there was this sense of tension between the religious leaders in charge of the rituals needed to approach the place where they thought God was dwelling; whilst, at the same time God, in the life of his Son, was out amongst the ordinary people and amongst those who were the wrong nationality, the wrong gender, the wrong state of health and who lived the wrong sort of life. From the birth of Jesus, God had burst out of the building and was transforming the lives of ordinary people

God was no longer to be found in a separate sacred space – but in everywhere Jesus went.

On Maundy Thursday when Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples saying “This is my body” he was commissioning them (and all who receive the communion bread) to carry this task of bringing the presence of God into the normality of the lives around us. Jesus reversed the direction of travel. In the old pattern people travelled to the temple to find God – now, having shown in his life how it is done, Jesus commissioned us to carry God, in us, to find people.

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The apostle Paul carried on this theme when he described Christians as the temple of the Holy Spirit: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

Over the centuries this transformation has become blurred and for a long time, and for many people, the church building has become more like the Old Testament temple - the place where God is thought to dwell. God has once again been separated from ordinary life (what we call a sacred/secular divide). Put crudely, people go to church to do their religious/God bit and carry on the rest of their life separate from him.

This is a trap we are all perhaps guilty of falling into. I remember, soon after I was ordained noticing I was thinking of taking my dog collar off to go shopping or to the pub – but my role as a leader of a Christian church doesn’t stop when I leave the building. And we don’t stop being Temples of the Holy Spirit when doing the normal things of life.

Jesus carried God into all corners of life – and wherever he went something of the rule of God was restored. This was the commission he gave his disciples on that first Maundy Thursday: to carry on, as his body, taking God in us out into our daily lives - so that in every encounter, every conversation we bring something of the light of the Gospel whether we are at home, on the telephone or as a key worker in our job. And when this is all over (which it will be) and we can once again

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meet in our churches – remember that the place God dwells is not in the building – but within the living temple – the people of God. It is so important that we don't just rush to take our faith back into hiding in our buildings, but accept the call from that first Maundy Thursday of being the body of Christ where we are: at home, at work and in leisure through prayer, through gossiping the good news of Jesus, through acceptance of the unlovely and through challenging injustice.

There is an old song from Graham Kendrick “let the flame burn brighter in the heart of the darkness” which could well be the anthem of the church as seek to be God bearers to the world. You can find it on You tube by searching for “Let the flame burn brighter of following the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLsdgfAvluw> Let the Flame burn brighter