

# The Legacy of God

Luke 22: 24 -38

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One of the most frequently painted scenes in history is that of the Last Supper. It is a worthy challenge for the greatest artists--the drama of love and betrayal. The thoughts of each subject find expression in posture, in faces, in hands. Jesus knows he is on the way to his death. The disciples, well at least in Luke's version, are having their argument over just who is the greatest. Peter is defending his loyalty. Judas is thinking about how best to betray the one who had been his friend. This is the house of the Lord!

Those who were here last week are wondering why we want to work so hard to enter through the narrow door if this is what we are going to find once we are in!

It is clear from the picture Luke paints that the legacy of God through Jesus is not a realm filled with angels. Just because we are with Jesus doesn't mean we have entered into heaven. Of course not, because Jesus wants us to be with him here and now, with our imperfect selves in an imperfect world.

So today we sit at the table of the Lord.

Jesus speaks.

The speech is often called a Farewell Discourse--a type of writing where the hero, knowing he is going to die, speaks to those who follow him. Luke uses this style, pulling together some of the sayings of Jesus into a speech, in order to guide those who would become the church. Remember, the church existed when Luke writes. So he, like Paul, is talking to a community that already exists. Unlike Paul, Luke is out of view; instead we see Jesus in the midst of his disciples.

Indeed, the disciples take front and center stage in each of the sayings of Jesus. The legacy of God is this group of arguing disciples. They are the ones who will bridge the gap between the time of Jesus and the present. They and we who follow are the ones who God is counting on to bring the gospel into the world.

The discourse is made up of 4 distinct parts...Jesus says to us Serve like me; abide with me, return when you fail, and be ready for trouble.

These are the brushstrokes that form a portrait of a good disciple; the brushstrokes of a special kind of art...J Art.

Jesus...who serves  
Abide  
Return when you fail  
Trouble, be ready for Trouble.            J Art

Beginning with Jesus, who serves. I think if there were to be one class I would add to the rigorous academic schedule of seminary, it would be how to create and host dinners, small and large. Church folk like to eat together. Even a potluck takes some preparation of tables, locating utensils to serve, and the clean up. I think I have spent a good part of my ministry in the kitchen...washing down counters, cleaning dishes, taking out trash while talking with the church family. I'm not sure why that wasn't part of my vision when I decided to enter into seminary.

To serve the church often means we are called to do little things like changing paraments or sweeping up the crumbs after communion, or folding bulletins. Indeed the word from which deacon comes...diakonos...is the word that Jesus uses here. Jesus suggests that it is when we willingly do these little things--no miracles in sight here--that we are being like him.

During Lent I went into the preschool room. I brought with me the ashes from Ash Wednesday because I thought it was cool that you could write with the ashes on white paper. The ashes were given to me by Pastor Chuck who had swept them out of the fireplace during our staff retreat. I held them in a flower vase which was full of flowers, a gift from Cyndi and the Deacons on January 8<sup>th</sup>, the day you agreed to have me serve you as your minister. I hadn't checked with either Carol or Nola beforehand because the idea had just come to me to share my discovery with the little ones.

So in I went full of energy into an atmosphere of quiet and peaceful activity. I think I was a little disruptive. Still, Nola and Carol went along with me that day. The children all got to hold a piece of ash and draw with it. Some drew more than one picture. The result...well, the same ash that draws on a white piece of paper, makes little hands black. I had my baby wipes with me and started to clean up. But the mess was a bit larger than my wipes could handle.

So Nola or Carol, one of them, got an idea. They took a plastic washing bin and went to the bathroom to fill it with warm soapy water. They brought it back. The children washed their hands. The teachers dried them with a towel.

Then they had the children sit in a semi-circle and going one by one, they took each child's hand, rubbed a little lotion in one saying "this is the hand that God loves"...and taking the next hand..."and this is the other one." The preschool

children waited their turn, not running forward...my turn, my turn...but waited in their seat, knowing that they would soon be touched by love.

When we choose to serve in love like Jesus, we create a different atmosphere in the house of the Lord. Our love can calm the jumpy soul. We can enact the healing, tender love of Jesus.

Jesus, who serves. J...

Next in J Art is A...

Abide with Jesus.

Jesus says to the disciples, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials..."

Contrary to many portrayals of the disciples in scripture and even contrary to the arguing disciples depicted only a little while before, Jesus praises the disciples as being those who have stood by him in times of trial. Again, I believe the church is very much in view here. During those early years, when the emperor cult was so strong, Christians risked their lives to meet and worship. They held tightly to Jesus.

At the end of Luke, the Resurrected Jesus returns to the disciples and opens their minds to understand the scriptures. Jesus says to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (John 24:47).

The disciples held tight to the call that they would preach repentance and forgiveness of sins, in Jesus name, to all the nations.

Last February there was a Leadership Conference put on by the UCC. They brought in two pastors to share their stories. The first story was told by a Hispanic man who was asked to close down a church in Florida. He started preaching instead. A church which had come close to death, because what was spoken of had more to do with the newspaper than Christ, caught fire. He commented with wonder...they were hungry for the gospel.

The second speaker was a woman called to a near dead church in Tucson Arizona. When Bridgette arrived, the church had given up their church space and met in a bar. There were a couple of people who refused to go along with changes in worship style. An out of tune piano and former opera singer led music in a dark, smoked filled bar. Twelve people entered in to worship on Sundays. The pastor changed the worship style. In doing so, she lost two people, but she gained 60,

about 20 of them came with her to the conference. They came because Bridgette held tight to Jesus—Jesus who, as she made so clear, spoke in many ways to reach all kinds of people.

Both pastors share a willingness to abide with Jesus, despite trouble, a refusal to give up even when all seemed lost. Abide, and the kingdom will come. We who are disciples, we will hold tight to Jesus. We will make the proclamation of the gospel to all people, that all may hear.

Serve as Jesus did  
Abide with Jesus

And

Return.

When we fail, return.

Satan appears here in our scripture as the one who demands that we all be sifted like wheat. We are going through the mill. We are all going to have trials of faith.

Like Peter, our first reaction is to suggest that we will never stray, we will never deny you Jesus. We are passionate that we will abide; passionate that we are abiding.

“I’m being faithful” we say as we continue to do that which moves us away from Jesus. I’m good at that. How many times have I jumped into administrative tasks because things “need to be done” rather than choosing to first spend time in prayer. But I’m being “faithful”. I came into the office. I even came in early. I’m doing what needs to be done to make church work.

Jesus speaks plainly, you will deny me Peter. You will deny me, my beloved disciples. You will mess up. You will weep.

Scripture suggests that for church to be Christ’s church we have to be humble enough to consider that perhaps even now we are not on the right track. Because if it is in the Peter to deny Jesus, the rock upon which the church is built, certainly it is in us. Put away the defensiveness that God through the Holy Spirit might speak to you, to us, more clearly.

When you come to those times when you see clearly that you are off track, do not run away. Remember you are in good company, for we all are sifted like wheat. Remember the good company that is here at your church and return.

I love the Bible Studies here because it is assumed you will come each week. If you can not make it, you call. So, on those occasions when you say something you wish you hadn't said, and perhaps others suggested you rethink your words, the next week you get to see the same people. Wonder of wonders, they still like you. They probably like you even more because you've let go of the presumption of your own perfection.

In returning to the community the next week and the next and the next, we build an understanding that even when we blow it we are welcome back in the kingdom of God.

Return.

J Ar ... t

Finally...the T...Trouble

In a reprise of the sending out of the 70 (chapter 10) to bring believers into the fold, Jesus suggests that they go again, but this time they will need to bring a purse and a bag and a sword. For I tell you, says Jesus, that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors,' meaning that instead of being seen as a hero, Jesus would be reckoned as criminal.

The vineyard of God, where God's care and protection kept all growing tall, has been destroyed. Jesus did not erect new walls to protect those who speak of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The sword suggests that there will be trouble. Note how the disciples immediately take count of the number of swords they have as if they could save them from trouble.

Jesus gave voice to repentance and the forgiveness of sins even as he was on the way to the cross. Even when we are in the midst of the trouble of the world, we will give voice to the gospel.

Trouble will not keep us from giving voice to the gospel.

When Don came to church with his wife Jean, he had already battled cancer for years. They sat in back because he needed to have a little space around him, trying to stay away from germs that might effect his treatment. One day a photographer, came into the church, not too far, maybe 10 feet and captured this couple singing joyfully a hymn. Jean had been an opera star; a woman with a beautiful voice who loved to sing. Don wrote poetry, beautiful words describing the gift God had given him in his wife. He loved to be by her side. Their joy was the picture of the church.

I've only been among you for 6 months. I'm still getting to know you. Yet, day after day I am visited by those who choose to talk about joy in their knowledge of God despite trouble. 12 steppers who have chosen to believe in the higher power and follow the path of healing--whose prayers bring tears to my eyes. Those who have been laid off who have used the time to let God lead them onto a new, more holy path. Those who grieve a great loss who continue to worship, continue to be part of community, continue to believe God has something new for them even though they feel empty...some by simply being here, others by gifts beyond my understanding. All continue to give voice to the gospel.

That's impressive. I praise God that I am not the only one you, who speak so loudly the gospel, encounter day after day.

Here is what made me fall in love with you.

Trouble happens in a church. People sometimes have a difference of opinion. I've even noted that there possibly are some differences of opinion around here. To speak the language of the gospel in church is to be willing to change...to repent...and at the same time be willing to forgive another. Usually it is the other way around, we want the other person to repent and then we can forgive. Around here, you repent...what is it that I've done that has got in the way...I've heard you ask yourselves this question...and you forgive...some of you say things like 'that is just the Aries part of her'...you forgive, knowing we all fall short of the glory of God, and in your giving of grace you allow the person to turn, to return.

I shared the following about this church with a friend who immediately replied you have landed in a church of grace. I'll warn you, it is a small thing, but I felt it spoke volumes.

The second time I led worship here, I jumped straight over the recall, going from Rodger's meditation right into the announcements. I remember seeing some big smiles from you, but thought that had more to do with my trouble speaking at that moment. Now this was February, so there were two services. In both, I managed to skip the recall. When I returned home, exhilarated from the feeling of leading you all in worship, David asked me if anyone commented on my missing the recall. "I forgot the recall?" I asked, mentally replaying the morning's worship. Oh, yeah...I guess I did.

Not one of you felt the need to teach me how it is supposed to be that day. Nor did anyone call later in the week. You gave me what you are used to giving one another...the benefit of the doubt.

Then, and in these past months, you have made me feel, well, like Don must have felt listening to his wife's beautiful singing voice...like I'm in the midst of a portrait of love.

Let us continue to transcend, with the help of God, our cacophony of voices and thoughts. We are the church, we are the disciples. We are J ART.... this is God's legacy... Indeed, this is the house of the Lord!