

Maundy Thursday - The Last Supper - 14th April 2022

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Date: 14 April 2022

Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take and eat. This is my body.

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Amen. We are remembering Jesus' last supper tonight, and the significance of that final meal for Jesus and his friends before his crucifixion.

It's a meal which has captured the imagination of artists for many centuries now. Indeed, the film clip we've just seen is one artistic interpretation of how the meal might have felt and looked.

[1 : 15] A dimly lit room with tables around which Jesus and his friends gathered. Alternatively, and most famously perhaps, there's Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century painting of the Last Supper, a source of both wonder and countless conspiracy theories over the years.

More recently, this final meal of Jesus continues to provide inspiration for contemporary artists, such as this painting by Francis Newton Souza, this one by Misa Miller Maida, this one by Jacob Brest, and this one by Jerry Blank.

Indeed, I stumbled across another painting of the Last Supper on display in a church the other week, which really caught my attention.

It's by the Scottish artist Ian Campbell, and is a modern take which features men from Glasgow's City Mission, a charity which cares for vulnerable adults by combating poverty and disadvantage. Each of the portraits of the men around the table are based on real-life people in real-life circumstances, whether that's homelessness, hunger or social isolation.

[2 : 39] It's a painting which for me brings the reality of the Last Supper into our contemporary culture. Jesus himself picked a right mixed bunch of blokes to be his twelve disciples.

Men not unlike those in this painting, men with their own stories and struggles, their own hopes, their own fears. What's most interesting though is that according to the artist, the question he's asked most often about this painting is this.

Which one is Jesus? Now I guess it's an understandable and obvious question to ask. It was the first question which came to my mind when I saw the painting.

Maybe it did for you too. But the trouble is, there is no obvious candidate for which one of these men is intended to be seen as Jesus.

In fact, asking which one is Jesus is itself a question which perhaps reveals something of our own preconceived ideas about who we expect Jesus to be or what we expect Jesus to look like.

[3 : 52] A Jesus who looks unique, different to those around him. A Jesus who behaves in ways which help him stand out from the crowd. Maybe.

Maybe. Jesus certainly was and is unique and different. His behaviour certainly did differentiate him from those around him. But in his appearance?

I'm not so sure. I mean, aside from the transfiguration and his post-resurrection appearances, there's little, if anything, in the Gospel accounts to suggest that Jesus was visibly different to those around him.

Indeed, there's a fascinating hint at this, which takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane on this very night, some two thousand years ago, when we're told this. Just as Jesus was speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, appeared.

With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them.

[5 : 00] The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him and lead him away under guard. Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, Rabbi, and kissed him.

The men seized Jesus and arrested him. You see, despite being a wanted man, Jesus evidently didn't stand out from those around him enough for the guards to know who he was in order to arrest him.

And so Judas had to identify Jesus with a kiss. In appearance, Jesus evidently looked no different to Peter, to Andrew, James, John, and so on.

And if we go back to Ian Campbell's painting, this desire for Jesus to blend into the crowd was a deliberate intention on the artist's part. He puts it like this.

He says, The whole time I was painting the picture, I reflected on Jesus' teaching that whenever we demonstrate love and kindness for the poorest and most neglected in society, it's as if they were Jesus.

[6 : 12] Any of the people in the painting could easily represent Jesus. You know, it strikes me that when we look for Jesus in the faces of those who look special or holy, those who stand out from the crowd or have a captivating presence to them, we may well be missing out on seeing Jesus in the very faces of those in whom he is most present.

Those who tend to be sidelined or ignored. Those who are shy or reclusive. Those who are depressed or insecure. Those who keep their head down for fear of being noticed.

It's in these very people, those who might be deemed to be the last, the lost, the least in our society, that I think we end up recognising and serving Jesus most clearly, most meaningfully, most majestically.

And that to me is a truth which is at the heart of this most special of evenings. This occasion when Jesus shared his last meal with those who were closest to him.

You see, in breaking bread and pouring out wine, Jesus was offering himself to his friends. But in asking them to do so in remembrance of him, it's as if he was calling his friends themselves to also be broken and poured out for others too.

[7 : 49] To be broken by the hurt and pain we encounter. To be poured out in seeking to comfort those in need. But being able, ultimately, to bring sustenance and hope to all by offering them the same bread of life and cup of salvation, which comes from knowing the love of our crucified yet resurrected Saviour.

May we recognise the presence of Jesus in all those whom God is calling us to love and serve. Amen.