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I think most of us would acknowledge that this is one of the most unusual Holy Weeks any of us have ever experienced. For many of us, this week in the church calendar is synonymous with more time spent with our church communities, worshipping together in familiar church buildings.

This year, our experience is very different.

But perhaps the confusion, pain, heartache and anxiety of our current situation might give us an insight into the experience of the disciples who lived through that first Holy Week. They, too, were living through events that were unprecedented in their experience, veering from joy and celebration on Palm Sunday, through the confusion of having their expectations of Jesus confounded in the Upper Room, the horror and desolation of Jesus' arrest, trial and execution, to the staggering, transformational encounters of Easter Sunday.

Be assured of our continued love and prayers as you travel through this very different Holy Week.

Louise, on behalf of the wider Arthur Rank Centre team

And it was night...

Bible Reading: John 13:21-32

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So, while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.'

Reflection

'And it was night': surely one of the most powerful phrases in John's Gospel as the sense of darkness begins to grow. Darkness for who? Certainly, Jesus was aware of the coming darkness. He knew what lay ahead and we see him wrestle with that in Gethsemane. He also felt the darkness of betrayal as Judas, a member of the group present at so much that Jesus had done, left to begin the process of handing him over.

What about Judas? He certainly began to enter darkness at this point. He managed to walk the path of betrayal, using the traitors' kiss and accepting the silver. Then it all unravelled as the darkness consumed him and he took his own life. Judas is the disciple we rarely talk about and yet certain phrases to do with him have entered our language: anyone accused of treachery can be termed a Judas, we talk of the traitor's kiss and 30 pieces of silver.

We still know very little about the man himself. Was he just a coward who betrayed Jesus to save his skin? Perhaps, as some have suggested, he was trying to push Jesus into showing who he really was, into becoming the Messiah Judas needed Jesus to be.

I suspect that we don't talk about Judas much because he challenges us. How often are we tempted to take the easy way out, to put ourselves first? Or to try and shape God into what we want, rather than allowing God to be who we need?

As we survey the havoc being caused by the coronavirus it is very easy to feel 'that it is night'. Many people will undoubtedly pass through the darkness of fear and the sadness of bereavement. Many working on the front line in both the NHS and care sector will feel anxiety and stress.

Our challenge at this time is to stand in our communities trying to show some light in that darkness. To be open to seeing what God is already doing and joining in, rather than trying to confine God to what we term as familiar. If the darkness threatens to engulf us we need to hang on to the glimpses of God's light that we see in others. As John's Gospel also says, 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1:5).

Prayer

Loving God, when all around seems clothed in darkness, help us to see your light.
As we see those around us struggle in the dark, help us to be your light.

As we walk through this Holy Week, unsure of what lies ahead, help us to know your light is there, waiting for Easter morning.
In Jesus' name, Amen

Response

As government and denominational guidance around coronavirus changes, it may not be possible to undertake all of our suggested responses. You should ALWAYS adhere to the latest guidance.

- Who could you have a chat with on the phone?
- Make sure to smile and wave if you see someone on your daily walk (keeping your distance, of course).
- How about putting some flowers from your garden, or perhaps a picture, in your window to cheer people up as they walk by? Many people are putting pictures of rainbows in their windows, a symbol which Christians have long understood as a promise of God's faithfulness in times of challenge.
- Churches Together in England have produced a Candle of Hope poster which can be printed off and put in your window; you could use this in conjunction with their weekly call to prayer on Sunday evenings at 7pm. (both at <https://www.cte.org.uk/>)

Revd Elizabeth Clark, National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches

