

## Betrayal

Of all negative experiences, nothing is so bitter as betrayal. It is always a crushing blow. Betrayal is profoundly disillusioning, destroying trust in the person – or institution – that betrays. It strikes at the heart of one's identity. More lastingly and more damagingly it may destroy one's capacity to trust at all. The poet W.B. Yeats, badly bitten by love, once offered this bitter counsel in a poem:

*'Never give all the heart...  
He that made this knows all the cost,  
For he gave all his heart and lost.'*

That is why the betrayal of Jesus strikes such a chord in our hearts. It is terrible stuff. The disciples had already run off. Despite swearing at the Last Supper that he would never betray him, Peter now curses and swears that he never even knew him! No wonder he wept bitterly afterwards. The same crowd that had greeted Jesus with, 'Hosanna,' will shortly call for his crucifixion. And the most bitter betrayal of all, the religious authorities of his people could not recognise him as the yearned-for Messiah, handing him over to the Romans for execution. As we sing at this season,

*He came from His blest throne  
Salvation to bestow;  
But men made strange, and none  
The longed-for Christ would know:*

And justly is it said,

*Never was love, dear King,  
Never was grief like Thine.*

Consequently, it is remarkable that after Easter, having been raised by God from the dead, when Jesus came and stood among his cowering disciples, he simply wished them peace. He showed them his wounded hands and side, the wounds he had received in the house of his friends.

He did not do what any of us might have done: he did not upbraid them for betraying him. Instead, he simply wished them peace. What are we to make of that? We are forever preaching – and rightly - that Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine. We are forever telling people that he really knows what we go through, because he went through it all himself. But does his wishing them peace so readily mean acting as if the terrible wound of betrayal could just be forgotten? Was he able to glide through to reconciliation without having to deal with any of those issues? If that were so, it wouldn't make him very sympathetic to me. But I don't think that was the case.

To find out why, we need to consider the time after his resurrection when he cooked breakfast for his friends by the Sea of Galilee. Gently, even gingerly, Jesus asked Peter if he loved him – Jesus - more than the others. Three times he asked him, clearly harking back to Peter's threefold betrayal! And Peter got the point. We are told that he was hurt. It must have felt like rubbing salt into his own wounds. Because Peter the rock had serious and painful cracks.

Jesus asked Peter the most dangerous question of all: 'Do you love me?' It is dangerous because the reply might be, 'No', or even worse, 'Yes, but not enough to stay with you when you need me', as before. But in that raw, delicate moment, Jesus called forth love and thereby generated healing. Yet perhaps the healing was not simply for Peter but for Jesus himself - truly human - truly wounded by betrayal. Does Jesus therefore understand the pain of our betrayals?

Surely, he does, because surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. On this Good Friday, if you have been wounded by betrayal, and if you have a cut that will not cease to bleed, take it to him. Take it to his cross.

He is the Lamb of God who carries away the sins of the world but also all our sorrows as well. By his wounds we have been healed. Take your betrayal to him, leave it with him at the cross - then go away and live...