

The Glory of God Through Changing Times

John 13:12-38

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I wonder how you cope with change? It's been quite a week gearing up for a new term with lots of change happening. I've had to learn a lot about dealing with change and uncertainty during my ministry. I guess it is part of maturing in the life of faith, but it doesn't seem to get any easier!

Over the summer I've had a chance to think and reflect on change quite a bit. A number of us went to New Wine festival at the end of July and it was a great community of time of worship, teaching and ministry. It is like the punctuation mark at the end of a busy year. Each year I visit the bookshop hoping to find something that would spark my interest for holiday reading and a bit of inspiration approaching the new term. But this year I couldn't find anything that grabbed me. Hundreds of books, but none appealed...oh dear.

However, as I left the bookshop, I prayed about it and asked the Lord what I should do. And a book title popped into my mind like a little arrow shot from another place in my memory. 'Three mile an hour God'. So, I ordered it, intrigued as to what it contained. I knew that the basic premise of the book is that 3 miles an hour is walking pace. And just as God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the garden, Jesus walked with his disciples in first century Palestine.

We need to learn to slow down and walk again because sometimes the most important interactions of our lives happen when we choose to walk instead of run.

Some of the book is a bit strange, but it did remind me The only time God is depicted as running is in the parable of the Prodigal son where he is the loving father looking out for the return of the lost.

God works in a different timeframe from us. Jesus never rushes things. In my bible readings earlier this week, the thought of the patience and three mile an hour pace of God helped me reframe this passage from John chapter 13 and see details I hadn't noticed before.

On his last night before his crucifixion, Jesus deliberately chose to spend leisurely relaxed time with his disciples in the quiet place of the upper room. Instead of gathering crowds and running around spreading the Word, he ate the Passover meal and shared simple bread and wine giving it new meaning and significance. But given he only had hours to live, it seems ludicrously slow.

Eugene Peterson noticed too the amazing unhurriedness of Jesus at the last supper: 'He gets his disciples by themselves and has a long, leisurely conversation with them (chapters 13-17) He starts out by washing their feet. He follows it up by going over, again and again the ways in which he is King and Messiah and the ways in which they are going to serve him as King and Messiah. Unhurried and patient, he completely revises their expectations. He then gathers it all up in a closing prayer.' Jesus doesn't rush, but that is because there is more going on than simple fellowship and conversation.

This account in John 13 is an extraordinary chapter in the Bible because it is like the calm before the storm. Events have conspired to come against Jesus and his ministry. Satan is ready to pounce upon his prey.

And yet this oasis moment of the upper room can help give us a new perspective on what is really going on in the kingdom at times of tumult and change. We mostly just observe things happening at the physical level.

Sometimes we struggle to comprehend what is going on or why. Sometimes things happen that are so painful we don't want to dwell on them too long. A loving Father pushes his daughter to safety but is killed by a falling sign at a big Church festival. Thousands of terrified travelers and workers are engulfed by a tsunami of mud and debris in Nepal and Tibet. Jet drones pound the weary citizens of Ukraine trying to break their will and surrender their lands. Many in our congregation struggle with health issues, work issues, money worries, or like me, are just about coping with all the changes and anxieties that occur at the start of a new term.

Well as I examined this passage of Scripture, I was amazed to see something I hadn't ever noticed before...

All the time he was sharing with the disciples, washing their feet, telling them about the future, Judas was still present with him.

Jesus knew all that time that one of his nearest and dearest would be lost to the dark side – that Satan had taken a foothold in his life, and he was on his way to betraying him.

Even as he approached the climax of his ministry and was taking time to fellowship with his closest friends, sadness and evil was right there with him. As Christians we often live parallel lives of joy and sadness, faith and doubt, hope and anxiety. But we actually discover that **for Jesus, coping with the challenges of disappointment and betrayal just revealed even more of his divine character.**

Verse 16-19 says:

John 13:16-19

(NIVUK) ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.
Jesus predicts his betrayal

¹⁸ 'I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfil this passage of Scripture: "He who shared my bread has turned against me."

¹⁹ 'I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am.

The disciples really didn't have a clue what was going on but God is at work even when we don't understand what is happening.

Notice verse 19: 'I am telling you now, so you *will* believe that **I AM**'

Jesus knew what was going on and was working through it. John deliberately places these words on the lips of Jesus as Judas is about to betray him. Jesus wasn't merely saying, "You'll understand that I knew this was coming." He was saying, "When this happens, you will know who I AM."

During the global week of prayer, we will be looking at each of the seven I AM statements of Jesus from John's Gospel. But those seven are Seven metaphorical sayings:

John 6:35 - ³⁵ I am the bread of life

John 8:12 - ¹² I am the light of the world

John 10:7 - ⁷ I am the gate

John 10:11 - ¹¹ I am the good shepherd

John 11:25 - ²⁵ I am the resurrection and the life

John 14:6 - ⁶ I am the way and the truth and the life

John 15:1 - ¹ I am the true vine.

(NIVUK)

The Greek is *egō eimi* (Ἐγὼ εἰμι) which is then followed by a noun.

But in addition to these, there are also Jesus' *absolute* "I am" sayings: for example, in John 8:58 -

John 8:58

(NIVUK) ⁵⁸ Before Abraham was, I AM

I AM. Egō eimi.

When he said *I am* so emphatically, the people picked up stones to throw at him but in that case he managed to hide himself and went out of the temple.

When we experience spiritual battle or difficult change, we need to look for the Lord to reveal more of his character through it.

This is so you will believe *I am who I am*, says Jesus.

Jesus shared his bread and verse 27 says:

John 13:27-30

(NIVUK) ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, 'What you are about to do, do quickly.' ²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out.

And it was night.

Such a short sentence: *And it was night*.

An emotionally low point for Jesus. Friendship lost. Gutted by betrayal. *It was night*. Sometimes we have those night-time moments of feeling lonely lost and confused. Things are out of our control. We feel emotionally wrecked.

John 13:31

(NIVUK) ³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.'

At the darkest moment of the night, at a moment of seeming disaster, God is still glorified.

Eugene Petersen again: 'we pray in the company of Jesus in order to relearn the meaning of a word that has been corrupted by our culture and debased by our sin. Jesus is the dictionary in which we look up the meaning of words. We look up **glory**, and what do we find? Obscurity, rejection, a sacrificial life, an obedient death. And through and in and around all that, the bright presence of God backlights what the world despises and ignores, what we so often despise and ignore.'

The link between the two parts of John's storytelling – Jesus' life and Jesus' death – is Jesus' four-word prayer: 'Father, glorify your name'

John 12:28

(NIVUK) ²⁸ **Father, glorify your name!**

But what we find is that **God's glory is not just being revealed in the light, joyous times, but also in the dark hidden, sometimes painful moments too.** Judas' betrayal doesn't derail Jesus' identity or God's purposes. It reveals them.

I came back from holiday and sat on my prayer chair in the study and I couldn't believe it. The Magnolia tree outside my window has grown enormously, and I only just noticed.

It reminded me of Jesus' parable of the growing seeds in Mark 4v26-29:

Mark 4:26-29

(NIVUK) ²⁶ **He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces corn – first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ As soon as the corn is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'**

So, on this day of change, and when the world is waiting to see if peace could break out in Ukraine, or when AI, Climate Change and Geopolitics threatens our comfortable existence, we need to see that:

- 1) We can trust God with the things we cannot yet see, because at the end of the day, *God will be glorified*.
- 2) At the cross, God took even the darkest things and turned them towards his glory and our salvation. So, when we cannot see what God is doing, we can still trust who God is.

As we go into this prayer week, I want us to pray more like Jesus – Father, Glorify your name!

Whether we experience joys or sorrows, tragedies or delights, God will be glorified. He is working his purposes out, and we need to align ourselves with him rather than simply asking him to bend to our will.

Habakkuk 2:14

(NIVUK) 14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.



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