



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

7th April, 2023

"Surely not I, Lord?"

Mark 14:17-20

Something new struck me recently reading the familiar words of the Last Supper. The disciples were gathered not knowing, of course, that it would be their last supper with Jesus. Their confidence had been eroded over recent weeks by Jesus' predictions of his death, of 'seeing him no more', and there had been some unnerving conversations on the journey to Jerusalem.

So when they gathered, in the rather tense atmosphere of that supper, it must have struck at their hearts when Jesus suddenly said, *"one of you will betray me"*. Not one of the wider group of followers, but *"one who is eating with me one of the Twelve, one (rather more intimately) who dips his bread into the bowl with me."*

It must have caused those twelve men to re-examine their inner selves in the long silent seconds that must have followed, each saying inwardly, "Could it be me? Have I lost confidence in Jesus, -or in the strength of my commitment to him? Might something happen tonight that will rob me of courage and love and loyalty, and cause me in panic to betray him?" Mark doesn't mention Judas at this point, but he records that *"one by one they said to him 'surely not I, Lord'"* ...All twelve... *"Surely not I, Lord?... Is it me, Lord?"*

Do you ever, like me, wonder how you would handle persecution, threats, or even torture -to myself or those I love- because of my faith in Jesus? When I hear what some sisters and brothers in Christ are suffering, I think I wouldn't cope. Perhaps I would betray or deny my Lord to save my loved ones, or my livelihood, -or my own skin. Many in Jesus' time were secret believers (like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, John 19:38-9), and no doubt many today *have to be* secret believers, and many *choose* to be. But to *deny* him, to *betray* him? ("Would I, Lord?")

My thoughts about these verses from Mark then led me on. By God's grace we live in an area where there is no immediate threat of the vile persecutions many suffer, to force me perhaps to betray or deny my Lord. But there are other forces here: the insidious, faith-sapping effects of secularism, which marginalises and derides faith in God; and the forces of wealth and materialism, which deny the need for God. We live with the trend to 'sanitise' thought, to qualify freedom of speech, to 'censor' Christian faith and expression in the name of equality, rights, avoidance of prejudice, discrimination, 'hate speech' or some other human priority.

So I look inwardly, as those disciples must have done in that upper room, and ask whether the cultural context in which I live may gradually dull me into, effectively, betraying or denying my Lord. It is a risk, I believe, for a Christian or a church- seeking favour and credibility in a God-averse society. *"Surely not us, Lord?"*

May God comfort and resource you, as he has promised, for all that you face in his love and service.

God bless you this week.