

Maundy Thursday 6th April 2023: St. Mary's Woodbridge with Great Bealings

Why is this night different from all other nights?

May it be given to me to speak +in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN

It was different from other nights, August 31st 2005: my 21st birthday. Up until the evening, that Wednesday had been a fairly quiet affair. In the previous July, I had become a graduate, and was anticipating beginning work as a teaching assistant in a local secondary school. I lived back home with my parents, who were so delighted by this circumstance after three years that they promptly jetted off to Florida for three weeks, leaving me and my sister to it. We were doing OK; then granddad turned up.

Mick Voase was not 'wear your heart on your sleeve' kind of fella, but we visited the farm where he'd lived from aged 15 a lot growing up, and ten years earlier, our grandma, Rita, had died aged 55 from pulmonary cancer, so we were used to seeing him. "Ahm off for a Chinese," he announced without formality. "Are you comin'?"

I don't suppose this greatly excited us. Sally, (my sister), I remember declined. No doubt a hot date with the latest boy or beauty product – she was 18. And I remember not being too bothered by the prospect, because for my part, I rather enjoyed the quiet house and the sense of independence, such that a fairly random decision to eat a Chinese at the local restaurant 4 miles away didn't float my boat massively, but we went, just he and me.

Like the disciples gathered in that upper room 2000 years ago, I couldn't possibly have known then, that what began as a rather reluctant acceptance of invitation, would turn out to be a last supper experience of my own.

Granddad was dead by that Christmas, you see. There would be no more Christmas (let alone alcoholic) spirit-filled argee-bargee around the Voase meal-table. For everything had changed. That night in high summer was truly different from all other nights.

And with our Orthodox Jewish brothers and sisters, here is a circumstance to which we can much relate in our own times. On the 5th of this month they began to observe the great festival of *Pesach*, which recollects the dramatic events of their ancestors' coming out of Egypt from the thrall of Pharaoh's despotic regime. This event is presented to us in the

'Coming-out' book, Exodus, but could well serve as a foreshadowing of recent dark years, as we've witnessed families' lives torn apart by Vladimir Putin's megalomaniacal devastation in Ukraine. Everything a people have known and possessed, changed forever in an instant; in the twinkling of an eye.

And similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic, with whose lasting effects we are currently learning to live, serves as a type of that exodus night – an historical time different from all that has gone before it, shaping our chronology and transforming our creationality, in ways hitherto unknown. As the youngest child of the Orthodox Jewish household recognises with us, "tonight [is] different from all other nights."

But why so? What is it about the ordinariness of a supper party, and the simplicity of bread and wine shared together which changes everything, and yet keeps everything the same. Why is this night different from all other nights?

The answer to this question is neither simple nor complicated, in fact. As ever, we are called to look this night on the rabbi Jesus, the *logos* who was in the beginning with God and who this night will demonstrate once and for all his complete identity, glorifying God in himself when he robes not with a state cope, but with a towel to bathe and dry the feet even of his betrayer to inaugurate a living hope of salvation into the world God loves so much.

This night is different from all other nights because the fulfilling of all the law and the prophets is dethroned from the skies and incarnated in the simplicity of earthly gifts – bread and wine – in which we see our God made visible, and through which we become completely one with the love of the God we cannot see. For when we see his humbleness in Christ, our teacher and our Lord, we cannot but do likewise, can we? We too gird ourselves with his towel – his symbol of humility – and the yoke of all that love is. We behold what we see on this most different of nights, as St. Augustine teaches, and so receive what we are.

We "do this in remembrance of him" this night and evermore, in order that we may be gathered to the eternal life of things past, by way of things present, to share in the future gifted to us in this last supper: this full, final sacrifice as Thomas Aquinas calls it. So the

importance of our remembering is transported to re-enactment – to embodiment – and ultimately to the glory of resurrection.

I was glad to accept that last Chinese with Granddad. When I think of it now, I can see how my past memory with its sadness would bring about for him the beginning of a future with the Christ he would come to know.

Tonight, as we enter once again what is present in the memorial of things past, we are invited to love's own table to taste the meat and drink of grace, and to be remembered with love's self in the making of a future new and better covenant. So tonight is *the* night. But we must sit down, says love, and taste and eat. Love grant us now and evermore, that we may so do – for every time we “do this in remembrance of him”, going out to this meal for the last time, we remember him, as though coming home – entering into the paschal mystery - for the first time. And so is born in us the recreating power of eternal day as unto the meek souls who receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

God grant that I have spoken to you in his name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN