

A meal with friends, close friends, friends with whom you've shared good times and bad, grown in understanding together, friends you can trust, at the end of a tiring day what could be more enjoyable?

I expect that we all have a picture in our minds of the Upper Room, influenced possibly by the famous and wonderful painting by Leonardo da Vinci, representing Jesus sitting at the centre of a long table with his disciples on either side of him. It is said to be based directly on John 13 v 21. the moment when Jesus told his disciples the devastating news that one of them was shortly going to betray him. They are depicted with astonished looks on their faces, staring at each other in disbelief, pointing, finding it almost impossible to take in what they have just been told. I don't know about you but I can imagine that this was probably very near to the truth of what would have happened, in that room, at that moment, on that night.

Jesus knew what only one other at that table knew - until that very moment - that in their midst was an enemy masquerading as a trusted friend, as one of the chosen ones. Judas - a name now synonymous with treacherous acts - was shortly to betray the Son of God for money. Sending him to his death on the cross. No longer was the atmosphere around that table one of friendly conversation and harmony, it must have changed in an instant to feelings of uncertainty, anger and fear.

Betrayal is a big word, not in length but in resonance - spies betray their country, those in positions of power sometimes betray their ideals. Surely though this doesn't apply to us. Have I ever betrayed a friend? OF COURSE NOT - but hang on a minute - maybe I have. There are small acts of betrayal that we hardly recognise as such - the thoughtless passing on of a confidence, is, after all, a betrayal - didn't mean to - it just slipped out. I think perhaps that I should take the plank out of my own eye, to enable me to see more clearly!

Jesus could easily have named his betrayer to the others, called on their support, had Judas removed, threatened into silence, shamed - but he didn't do any of those things. He trusted implicitly and did his Father's will, knowing only too well that the outcome was to be his death, a prolonged, violent, agonising,

public death. Such obedience and trust is almost too much for me and I suspect most of us, to comprehend.

Trusting in God is sometimes very hard. When something catastrophic happens in our lives, to us, or to those we love and care about, it can be very difficult to hang on in there. But only when we take it to the Lord can we begin to recover our strength, our sanity, our normality. Trusting as Jesus did is beyond us but we can strive to get as close as possible to his amazing, absolute trust, in the Father. To be a friend of Jesus, to trust in the Father can and will and does, transform lives.

During our communion service this evening let us, just for a moment take ourselves in spirit into that Upper Room when Jesus takes the bread and the cup of wine and gives them to his friends. He knew *full well what would follow but nevertheless trusted in his Father for the future*. This simple act has become the bedrock of our faith. AMEN.

Let us pray - on this Monday of Holy week let us pray for this church, as a new chapter begins. We pray that more people will come to visit, to admire this beautiful building and that some will be drawn to join us in worship. Help us lord to be open to the way you want us to be, now and in the future, here in St. Brandon's Brancepeth.

Let us pray for the young people who attend our Sunday morning services. For the older children and teenagers who took part so meaningfully in last weeks licensing service and on Palm Sunday and for the little ones who cheer us with their smiles. May they all grow strong and confident in their love for the Lord Jesus.

The yellow bin at the back of the church reminds us that there are many folk who struggle to put sufficient food on the table for themselves or for their families. We pray for those who are out of work and for those in working poverty who need this help.

Father, we offer you both our prayers and our lives,
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.