

MAUNDY THURSDAY

No-one's story.

Look, I've not got much time and my master might be back at any moment. He wouldn't like me talking to you, especially now!

I know you've all heard stories about that Galilean rabbi, the one they hung out a couple of days ago, the one there's so many rumours about. Well, just listen, because I've got one you haven't heard, because, I was there, I saw him.

I'm a foot-slave, the one that crawls around on the floor washing guests' feet as they come in. "As you should have at any house worth anything," as my master would say. I'm at that house over there, the one at the corner of the market, the one with the green carpet hung outside.

My master often rents out the upstairs room. At Passover he can get a lot of money for one evening's rent!

I can tell you, I've had a lot of rough times at Passover, people thinking it funny to give me a kick, a push or a smacked head while all I'm trying to do is wash their feet.

Well, this year my master rented it out to a gang of Galileans. Yes, that's right, "primitive northerners," as they say!.

Well, perhaps rented out is the wrong way of putting it, because it seems he gave it to them free. Now that got us all talking, back at the house; perhaps they had something on him, maybe they threatened him, or something worse!

So there I was, a few nights back, waiting at the top of the stairs, bowl and towel ready and not feeling exactly happy about the situation. Well, my master had already made himself scarce after making sure everything was ready for them. Not a good sign, I thought.

I heard them coming up the stairs, laughing, shouting, the usual!

First one up, dark haired, smiley sort of man. I got ready, and he waved me to one side, I couldn't get to his feet! Then he stood between me and the others as they came past, gave me a smile and went in!

I was terrified that my master would get to hear that I hadn't treated his guests properly. He's not exactly the sort of man you disobey.

They all went in and sat around the low table, and I went and settled in a dark corner of the room, hoping that there might be scraps from the meal that I could grab before everything got cleared away.

It was a typical Passover Meal and when it was finished they all started chattering, laughing, name-calling. Nothing different!

And then it happened.

The smiley one got up, went to the door, gesturing to me to do nothing, and picked up my bowl and towel!

He went over to the table and said to his friends,

"Come on, I'm going to wash your feet."

They all looked at him and one of them, a big bloke, bit scary, said "No, you're not going to wash MY feet!" as if he couldn't believe he was going to crawl round the floor like a slave, like ME!

"If you don't let me wash your feet" he said, staring right into his face, "you can't be part of me"

Well, the big bloke shouted out. "Is that right? Well, wash all of me, because I always want to be part of YOU"

Everyone stared, I did too.

"You don't need washing all over, you're already clean."

Well, if that was clean, I daren't think what he'd call dirty.

They all stood there as he crawled around the floor, washing their feet.

Some of them smiled, nervously, and the youngest one just fixed his eyes on the rabbi as he washed his feet, just as if he were in a trance, just as if he suddenly realised something special had just happened.

And that's when MY life changed.

What had he said? "If you don't let me wash your feet, you can't be part of me"

The rabbi had said, and I have to keep calling him rabbi now, because he's taught me something, that washing someone's feet meant that you were both part of something bigger, much bigger.

And I washed feet!!

They all went back around the table, but I noticed the young one, still staring, almost not quite realising that time had moved on.

The rabbi reached across the table. No-one noticed him doing it. He picked up a lump of left-over bread and, after looking in a few empty ones, picked up a cup with some wine in it. He put them in front of him and looked at them all.

Slowly, the conversations stopped and they all looked at him. The room, well, you might not believe this, the room suddenly had a very strange feel to it.

I was beginning to feel uneasy.

He started to speak;

"I want you to think of this bread as my body, it's going to be broken for you all, so that you will always know that what I told you is going to come true."

What? What? I was even more scared now, even though he had said it calmly, or perhaps because he had said it calmly.

He passed the bread round and they all had a piece. I noticed some of them were uncertain, but a couple of them looked at each other and gave that sort of nod that made me think they knew what he meant.

Then he picked up the cup:

"This wine is my blood and it's going to be spilt for you, so that you will know me always and that all your sins have been forgiven."

Blood spilt!! Sins forgiven? Only God can do that!

Galileans? Just Galileans? No, something else was going on here.

I suddenly felt a dropping feeling in the base of my stomach.

Are they Zealots? Is this Revolution?

They all sipped the wine as it was passed round and those two I'd noticed before were smiling now.

Then, then, well, I wasn't expecting what came next.

The rabbi wasn't smiling any more. His expression was, well, hard to describe, really. It was sadness and devastation in one look.

"One of you is going to betray me."

They all started shouting: "Who?" "Not me!" "What's he saying?"

Then one of the older ones nudged the youngster, whispered something and the youngster asked the direct question. "Who is it?"

He stood there, unsmiling, sad, and looked down.

He picked up a bowl that had some dregs of wine and a piece of bread.

"It's the one I'm giving the scrapings from the bowl to."

He wiped the bread around the bowl and gave it to one of the two men who had been giving each other those knowing looks.

"Go on," he said, "do what you've got to do."

The man stood up and walked straight past me, out of the door and down the stairs. You would have thought that the rest of them would have been badly shaken by all this, but, well, they weren't and after an awkward silence and a few whispers, they started chattering, laughing.

I looked at the smiley one, you have guessed who he was, haven't you?

You want to know how the night ended?

Just like any other Passover meal ended, lots of laughing, singing away as they went down the stairs into the night.

But the Rabbi wasn't singing or laughing.



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