

By Ken Woodley

Here we are, gathered in this upstairs room somewhere in the secret heart of Jerusalem on Maundy Thursday.

The Garden of Gesthemane is not far away. Neither are those coming to arrest Jesus as he prays for some other way. Any other way.

We can almost hear their footsteps. So can Jesus but he does not run away. Jesus does not leave us even though he knows what those footsteps mean, even though he knows where those footsteps are going to take him.

The darkness is coming. It is falling all around us, and yet Jesus does not abandon us to the darkness of the world.

Instead of running away to save his own life, Jesus gets up from the table. We watch as he takes off his outer robe and then ties a towel around himself, the footsteps growing closer in the closing darkness.

Jesus pours water in a basin. We see it there. And then Jesus begins to wash our feet.

We feel the touch of his hands upon the dusty soles of our own footsteps that brought us to this upstairs room to be with him tonight. But, more than that, we feel the touch of his heart upon the soul that is deep within us.

And footsteps that are not ours grow ever closer as the darkness of the night grows ever deeper.

When we are not looking, Judas will slip out through that door, down the steps and around the corner to make certain those footsteps find their way to the garden where Jesus is going to pray that the hammered nails and the crucifixion cross will not be necessary.

But just a word before Judas leaves. Just a word before we follow Jesus into the garden, directly into the path of the footsteps hammering their way with nailed certainty.

Jesus has just one more thing to say to us in this upstairs room. One last word. And so it must be of utmost importance. The one thought Jesus wants to leave behind in our hearts, yeast for our souls, communion words for all those that will follow us, in later years, into this upstairs room with Jesus on Maundy Thursday.

“I give you a new commandment,” Jesus tells us, as Judas gets closer and closer to the door. “To love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Judas never understood and leaves for a rendezvous in the garden, a rendezvous with the footsteps in the darkness.

We can almost see Judas shaking his head in bitter disappointment. “Love,” he says. “No true messiah would leave us with nothing more than love.”

Oh, and how Judas was so very wrong.