

There is in the gospels a recurring pattern of people being gathered, upheld and sent. Jesus gathers people together, upholds and blesses them, and then sends them out to do something. Our liturgies are intended to follow a similar pattern of being gathered together, upheld and blessed, and then sent out to serve.

The crowd from the city gathers at Simon's mother-in-law's house in Nazareth; they are blessed by being healed from their infirmities, and they are sent out. The multitude (5,000 people) gathers in the wilderness, they are upheld by being fed and they are sent home. Mary and the women gather at the tomb, they are blessed by an encounter with the resurrected Lord and they are told to go and tell the others. The disciples are gathered in their boats to go fishing, blessed with a bountiful catch of fish, and they are sent. This is the recurring pattern.

And often there is a reporting back or an accounting of what happened: the demons submitted, the people were healed, the dead

were raised, the crowds believed. It is all quite astonishing.

In all of this it is as though a curtain is being drawn back to reveal the glory of God in their midst; and the curtain keeps getting drawn back further and further to embrace more and more people. The glory of God, which first shone around the shepherds outside of Bethlehem one night, soon began to shine on paralytics and lepers, women and children, tax collectors and sinners, Samaritans and Roman centurions. It even goes so far, and this is a bit too far for some, to embrace Gentiles, those outside of the household of faith; those outside of the covenant; those, like you and me, who were seen to be unclean.

When Peter comes back to Jerusalem to report that even Gentiles were being baptized, there was a bit of resistance, some caution about whether this was legitimate or acceptable. And Peter has to defend his actions with a description of a dream that he had, whereby God declares clean, what he had thought was unclean.

There is in any group of people a constant defining of who is in and who is out; who belongs and who does not belong; who is at the front and who is at the end. The movement of the glory of God seems to be always pushing the boundary to include more and more people. In fact, those who were last, became first; and those who were first became last.

It's all rather uncomfortable, because you thought you knew where you were in the line, and then everything gets shifted. You thought you were somewhere at the front of the line, but you end up somewhere else. John the Baptist, who was the first, becomes "least" in the kingdom of heaven. Saul, the murderer and persecutor, the one untimely born at the end of the line, becomes the forerunner of the gospel.

So in the gospel reading, when Jesus speaks of being glorified by God, of being made known, it is triggered by Judas' departure from the table of the passover meal. When Judas had got up and gone out, Jesus said, "*Now* the Son of Man has been glorified." What an extraordinary but very important thing to say.



All of the events of the passion are triggered by Judas' departure from the table. Judas becomes the last. But Jesus follows his footsteps and runs even further behind Judas to become even more so the least and the last, the one who is finally, and most unexpectedly, convicted and condemned. So in the movement of extending the glory of God, if Jesus runs even further behind and further beyond where Judas goes, then there is always hope. There are *no* limits to how far the glory of God can shine.

The glory of God can shine on Saul, on Samaritans, on lepers, on centurions, tax collectors, on Gentiles, and even on Judas. Because they *all* belong to this covenant.

Having been gathered into this covenant, upheld and blessed by this encounter, we too are sent. So by this, Jesus says, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

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