

***Places Of The Passion:
The Upper Room***

Mark 14:1-16

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

A sermon in the form of a prayer to Jesus...

Who was he, Lord?

Who was this anonymous fellow that provided the place for your Passover?

Who was he, the host of the first Lord's Supper?

Only you know, Lord.

Who was he, Lord,

in a city of many small houses crammed together,

this person that owned a home bigger than most,

with an upper floor and a room big enough to accommodate the thirteen of you?

Who was he, Lord?

He must have been a person of considerable means.

No ordinary person.

A rung or two up on the economic and social ladder.

Only you know his identity, Lord.

He's as anonymous to us as the woman who came into Simon the Leper's house two days before;

the woman who broke a jar of expensive perfume, and poured it on your head;

the woman who's anointing you accepted as an expensive love gift,

a gift given in preparation for your burial

a gift the giving of which will be told for generations to come.

a gift of love

a gift of sacrificial love.

Her name is withheld from us.

Only you know that.

The act she performed - **that** your Holy Spirit revealed to us.

An act of inspiration and example.

Just like the home owner, Lord.

Also giving a gift of love

a gift of sacrificial love.

His name, too, is withheld from us.

His name, too, is only known to you, Lord.

The act he performed - **that** your Holy Spirit revealed to us.

An act of inspiration and example.

I imagine that he was a man of means.

I also imagine, Lord Jesus, that he was a man of courage.

He would have known, he would have felt, the undercurrents of hatred that rippled through Jerusalem the days and weeks before your arrest.

As an upperclass person, perhaps he had been part of the secret meetings held by the authorities who wanted you dead.

Perhaps he had heard the talking and planning and scheming.

Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

Perhaps he had felt the jealous rage emanating from their souls.

Surely he was aware of the order given, reported in John 11, that any who knew where you were should report it, so that you could be arrested and killed.

Maybe he'd also heard that Lazarus was to be arrested and killed.

Indeed, it was a dangerous time, Lord.

Peter knew that - and it led to him denying you when confronted.
Mark, the author of the gospel knew that - and when someone seized his garment in the dark Garden of Gethsemane, he ran away naked.
The other disciples knew it. They ran away from you, too.

Who would dare to openly associate with you?
Let alone receive you as a house guest?
The risks would have been enormous.

Yet, when you, as an outsider in Jerusalem, were looking for a place
he stepped forward.

I don't know how much contact you had with him before this.
Did he come to you under the cover of darkness, like Nicodemus?
Did he watch you from afar, perhaps coming with some of the Pharisees and Sadducees, like Joseph of Arimathea?

We don't know his name, Lord, but we know his heart.
We know his heart by his actions.
We know that he was as much **ON** your side
as Judas was **NOT** on your side.

Yes, Lord, while you had a secret enemy among your friends,
you also had a secret friend among your enemies.
As Augustine put it, "There were wolves among the sheep. There were also sheep among the wolves." [Bruner *Matthew*]

This homeowner was one of your sheep, O Good Shepherd!
He was one of the ones for whom you would give your life as Passover Lamb.
You put yourself in harm's way for him.
And we understand it, Lord - even if we don't know him....
....yes, we understand that he put himself
in potential harm's way for you, too.

I guess that's why you arranged your secret signal.
Yes, Lord, we realize. We realize that it was a signal. In a culture where men walked with wineskins and women carried jars of water, it would have been an easily noticeable thing to see a man carrying a jar of water. Nothing scandalous or the like - but easily noticeable.
It made a good signal.
Amid the danger and all the hostility of Jerusalem, your disciples could quietly follow him from a distance, in the crowd.
No contact. No looks. No words. Keeping distant.
Strangers to any peering eye.

They could wait till he had entered the home, and then knock on the door to speak to this unnamed follower of yours. And you'd apparently arranged a verbal connect.

"The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"

And it would all be ready.
The table. The couches. The utensils. The water basin and towel.
You could come with your disciples and the food.
You were welcome.

His home was open to you.

Even though it was risky to do so.

Even though the authorities had ordered that it not be so.

Even though all that -

- his home was open to you!

I wonder what went through his mind, Lord?

Could he have been tempted to say something like:

- "I love you with all my heart - but surely you don't want me to put the lives of my wife and children in danger, do you?"

or

- "I love you with all my soul - but let's be practical. How could I serve you if I die? And wouldn't you yourself be less than loving to ask such a risk of me?"

or

- "I love you with all my mind - but I'm nobody special; I'm no hero of the faith. Perhaps Mother Theresa could do it. Or Martin Luther King could do it. Perhaps you should ask someone like that."

[from Walter Wangerin *Reliving The Passion*, p.49]

Perhaps he was so tempted.

Perhaps he almost said something like that.

Perhaps it took him a while to work up the courage to say what he said.

Or perhaps not.

I don't know, Lord.

All I know is what at the end of the day he said -

"You are welcome at my house."

All I know is that he invited you in.

Risk or no risk.

He welcomed you home.

When you had no place

to lay your head

or rest your feet

He invited you in.

I'm sure he didn't understand, Jesus, what was all going on.

Like Joseph of Arimathea, all he knew

was that he couldn't turn his back on you.

He wouldn't have known that you were about to sacrifice yourself for him;

the enormous risk you would undertake on his behalf - and mine.

He couldn't have understood.

He couldn't have known.

He couldn't have fully comprehended that you are the Great Passover Lamb,

the one of whom your servant Paul would later write in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "*Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.*"

But he welcomed you in.

And all of this makes me wonder, Jesus.

How would I respond?

Or better yet -

- speculation about how I **might** respond in some imaginary time and place centuries ago....
laying all that aside

I wonder -

How **DO** I respond to your call today?

Unlike this nameless fellow, I
as a matter of fact

DO

know the risks you took for me
the sacrifice you made for me
the heavenly welcome that you extend to me

I **know** all that!

And so -

- When you knock at my door, what do my actions provide by way of response?

The Bible tells me that you **ARE** knocking!

"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends.

(Rev 3:20)

Will I let you into **my** "Upper Room"?

Will I?

Are there, perhaps, rooms of my life where I'd be ashamed to have you sit?

Rooms where I'd rather you not enter, 'cause it might be inconvenient?

Rooms where you might want something to change?

What goes on in my bedroom - do I welcome you there?

What goes on in my TV room - do I welcome you there?

What goes on in my office - do I welcome you there?

It may be risky, Lord, to have you around.

Because if I name something in my society as being wrong, I may get labelled. People may roll their eyes, call me intolerant.... or worse.

Because if I display commitment to you, I'll be told to stuff that into a private space, and keep it to myself.

And I worry, Lord, about what it will cost me.

'Cause I know it **will** cost.

That unnamed wealthy person was willing to risk the cost.

But, Lord, am I?

I know you'll start asking questions about who I welcome into my big suburban house in your name.....

.....and may well look at me with those piercing holy eyes when I have to admit that, well, I'd rather keep my home as my castle and am not really comfortable having strangers in.

And beyond my home I know you'll wonder about which homeless ones here in Ottawa, who
like you

ALSO have no place to lay their head,
I'm befriending or at least providing aid to.

And beyond this city I know, Lord, that you watch us hoard our wealth and build our homes, and sip
our cappuccinos and lattes while homeless children die each day, and millions suffer because of
unjust monetary policies that our Western economies had a hand in establishing.....

....and do I at least **try** to make some kind of a difference
when you knock on the door of my home and ask me to try?

I know, Lord, that when you knock on my door, and move into my house, you might well start asking
me questions about who, in what developing country, made all that stuff which I like to enjoy at rock
bottom, so-called bargain prices.

In what sort of sweat shops were they forced to work?
Or what middleman stole their profits away from them?

and you wonder how I welcome them..... or shut them out.....

'cause you interpret my response to them
as a direct response
to
you!

And suddenly, Lord,
these innocent few verses about some nameless guy
welcoming you in
and giving you a place to sit and rest and eat
well,
they trouble me.

I can't read past them so quickly anymore, Lord.

And I wonder.....

....How welcoming

....am

....I

....to you?