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As we stand on the threshold of the holiest days of the year, John's gospel paints a picture in which we can easily imagine ourselves – a gathering of friends at dinner. We come upon the scene just after Jesus has washed the feet of his disciples. There is a sense that something remarkable has happened, but John also portrays Jesus and the disciples in very human terms – reclining at table in the custom of their culture. But this passage is far more than a description of a dinner. It is unsettling, filled with tension. But this passage is far more than a narrative of events preceding Jesus' betrayal. Like most of John's gospel it has many layers of meaning. Perhaps this is one reason why it feels so disturbing. Isn't there a sense that in hearing this passage we are experiencing events in our own faith journeys?

Jesus appears very vulnerable in today's reading. He is deeply troubled as he prepares himself to face the horrific ordeal of torture and execution and the heart-rending pain of betrayal. Perhaps he still hopes, as he later prays, that somehow this cup will pass. As Jesus hands Judas the bread he has dipped in the dish, we cannot help but see the similarity to the Eucharist. Yet, Judas receives the bread from Jesus and disappears into a darkness that will not end until Jesus has suffered and died and Judas, too, has perished by his own hand. And it is not only Judas who will betray Jesus. All of the disciples will flee, and Peter will deny that he even knows Jesus. In his hour of greatest need, Jesus' closest friends will abandon him.

Knowing what is to come makes it hard to hear this story, yet when we listen carefully perhaps we will hear John calling us to listen for echoes of our own lives. How often have we, like the disciples, basked in Jesus' love only to forget who we are in times of trouble? How often, have we, like Peter, followed Jesus with our hearts and souls and then denied in word or deed that we belong to God? How often have we celebrated the Eucharist and then, like Judas, walked away from the light of Jesus' presence into darkness? Perhaps this passage is so troubling because it reminds us that we, too, often fail Jesus. This recognition takes us to a painful point in our faith journeys. But perhaps it is a place where we should linger for just a while as we prepare for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Now, more than at any time in the liturgical year, we are called to consider our own sinfulness. When we contemplate our own unworthiness, we gain an even greater sense of the wonder of these holy days and the great gift Jesus has given to us.

But even as we reflect on our sins, we know that darkness will not prevail over light in either Jesus' time or our own. In John's gospel there is a sense that we are witnessing not only events that took place long ago in Palestine, but the whole panoply of salvation history. As we listen to this passage we know that Judas is about to betray Jesus. But even as these terrible events begin to unfold, we know that God is accomplishing the salvation of the world. The cross overshadows this final gathering of Jesus and the twelve, but the light of Easter morning shines forth beyond the cross. As Jesus himself proclaims, we are about to witness the glorification of God and God's glorification of his Son, our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Consequently, while we can and should take time to reflect on our sins as we prepare to pray with Jesus in Gethsemane and steel ourselves to walk with him to Golgotha, we also look

forward to the great work that God is accomplishing through Jesus' passion and death. We know that, despite their shortcomings, eleven of those flawed human beings who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper are about to become the great witnesses to our faith – the evangelists who will courageously and lovingly carry the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection throughout the world. Perhaps, in the end, this is what differentiates the other disciples from Judas. True, they did not hand Jesus over to the authorities, but they did deny him and abandon him. Ultimately, however, unlike Judas, Peter and the rest not despair. They remembered who Jesus was – the Son of God through whom all things were created, the Redeemer of the universe, the human personification of love beyond all measure, the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the love capable of forgiving even the greatest of sins.

So perhaps one message of today's gospel is that the light of God's love shines forth even as Jesus is about to be betrayed. In the hour of Jesus' betrayal, the light of the Resurrection shines forth as the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son in the Holy Spirit. No power in all of the universe can ever eclipse the light of that love. And that indeed is good news for each of us.