



At the start of the mass....

Today, Jesus meets us in the Passover meal. He takes us back to the start of Creation, back to the Garden of Eden, back to when everything went wrong... and he meets us in the garden there, and takes all that on his shoulders. He pours himself out for us, offering his love to absorb all of our hurt.... and promises us that he will be always with us. That the love that meets us in the garden of tears can lead us back to the garden of Eden, meet us in all that has gone awry, wash us in tears, pour love and life over us, and begin anew....

When I was a child I learnt the violin at school. And we were taken one day to a Primary School some miles away for a violin workshop day. It got to lunch. I suspect instructions were given, but probably I hadn't heard them. ... but all the children disappeared, and I had no idea to where. I wandered long corridors, hopelessly lost, all on my own. Eventually, from a corridor, I glimpsed a garden. It was a beautiful garden, grass and flowers and children playing. I looked, and tried to join them, but I couldn't find the way in.... there was the garden, there were the children, and ... there was I, separated in a corridor with many brown doors. I was enough of a reader to recognise that my experience felt like an allegory or a fairy story of some sort, and enough of a child to simply feel lonely, and tearful and frustrated. Later, much later, it felt; maybe ten or fifteen minutes in real time - a girl I knew passed by me - returning from a trip to the little girls' room, and ... she

gathered me up. She took me with her to the garden, although only a few minutes of lunch were left. I tell you... it felt like heaven.

I wonder, really, whether in many ways we all seek for a way into the Garden. Perhaps in less of a literal way than my eight-year-old self. But nonetheless, a sense of exile, a sense of hunger, a sense of long journeys and many doors, of something lost, and a longing for beauty. Perhaps especially right now, when the corridors of power in the world seem racing to everlasting dead ends, and the garden of creation irrevocably damaged and hurting.

Tonight is in a way all about Gardens. But this one we *are* going to enter... together... all of us, with no one left behind.....

Before the footwashing...

Tonight is in a way all about Gardens. But this one we *are* going to enter... together... all of us, with no one left behind.....

I wonder if you can picture it. It's night. We have been wandering around for a while trying to find our way in. Perhaps on the way, over the years, we have picked up all sorts of story, hurts and tears, confusions and questions – short through with the joy that has kept us going, and the hope, but maybe we are feeling a bit tattered, a bit... defeated even. Suddenly we meet someone, and ask him where the gate is. He looks strained, tired, tear-streaked, but, strangely, he smiles radiantly at us: 'I am the Gate' he says... takes our hands, and just as suddenly, we are entering in. Jesus is our Gate, through which we enter. Let us take his hand, and enter through this dark gate, under the trees here.

It's like a time-slip, this night, as all times come together into one. All tears, and all gardens of new life and hope. Take hold of Jesus' hands and let him take us into the deeper darkness, for now, let us trust in the radiance of that smile.

Suddenly we see, just off to the side as we enter... a bush. It's clear in the darkness, it is blazing with fire. No smoke, no sparks, and it is not consumed, it just blazes.

A voice comes from the bush, like a memory, but one that is lived right now, in this moment, all new. *I have heard my people's cry* it says... *Take off your shoes, for you stand on Holy Ground...*

.... And there is Moses, sent by God to lead his people out from slavery....

Who shall I tell them it is, who sends me.... he asks,
tell them 'I am who I am' says the Voice.

.... And Jesus, standing with us, smiles.

Take off your shoes, for you are in the presence of God....

We take off our shoes, and suddenly, there is Jesus, the Gate, with water, and towels... kneeling, asking to wash our feet. Without leaving the Garden, we are at the Last Supper.

.... Of course we are, it's that story, always told at this meal, of God leading his people out of brokenness and slavery, into freedom and life, and a land of beauty and plenty – leading us home from exile.

There are people round us now: the disciples, all tired, all dirty, and all looking horrified.

Only slaves, and wives, could wash feet.

Feet were disgustingly dirty – hot, sweaty, covered in the dust of the road... and whatever else might be on roads that were often travelled by donkeys and camels, and where wild dogs ran loose... yeah, you can imagine. It's a job that only slaves could do – too disgusting for anyone else.... Or maybe your wife... someone who loved you so much they would do something like that for you.

And there's Jesus, saying, *let me wash you*. All that.... All that which you have picked up on your journey... let me wash that away. And... I love you, so intimately, so deeply, that in my eyes, my Beloved, this is a privilege and

an honour. If you want to be part of my love in the world, if you want to get any further into the garden ... you need to let me do this. To get between your toes, and the bits you hide, and the muck and the ... *&&%!* ... of life.... Let me wash you. Don't let it cling to you, in your need to hide.

So, on this feast.. the feast of God's saving love bringing us out of slavery and brokenness... he washes us. Washing all that history, all that shame, all that impossibility. Kneeling at our feet.

And he shows us, too, how to love again. Anew. Something in our heart comes home, drops its defences, drops its fears... and comes to flower.

After the footwashing, before Communion...

Let me wash you – let's begin again, says Jesus.

And tell the story in a new way.

I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you, he says, before I suffer...

We were looking for a garden, but to get there, Jesus meets us tonight in the Passover meal. No wonder he is in Jerusalem. All the Jews of this time had to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, because that's where the Temple was – where the presence of God was, where a lamb must be offered to the temple priests for Sacrifice. It's funny, it feels, being there with Jesus, strangely as if we *are* where the Presence of God is... that a new Temple is here, that's been walking with us through this night.

But, let us join the ancient meal, telling the story – literally - of how the Lord had heard his people's cries of distress in slavery, and brought them out from slavery, freed for new life. How the people were caught in slavery in Egypt, how Moses was sent by God to bring them to freedom. The ten plagues which were visited upon Egypt, culminating by the terrible death of

the first-born sons, where the people of Israel were kept safe from death by painting a sign on the lintel of their door in the blood of a newly sacrificed lamb.

Let us join the table, and raise the first cups of wine together and give thanks. See, now Jesus, as the Father of the meal, takes the cup of Proclamation, and the cup of Blessing, and proclaims all that the Lord has done and our trust that he will do it again in the age-old words that never change. Proclaims, if you like, all the griefs, and the things that limited us – all the brokenness of the world, since the day we fell from Paradise, to the things that hurt our hearts right now in our own stories ... and remembers how God came into it, how he heard his people's cry - and looks forward to the coming of the Messiah – who was always foretold to come *on this night, this holy night of redemption and freedom.*

But... *this is new...* instead of explaining the meaning of the bread and the lamb reminding of the unleavened bread, and the body of the Passover lamb as all our fathers have done for all the generations he is looking deep through our eyes and into our hearts.. the world slows down and time and meaning rushes together as he proclaims it as *my body, given for you.*

And suddenly, the Gate, the lover, the slave, ... is revealed too as The Lamb.

Behold the Lamb of God, said John, all that time ago when Jesus first walked the lakeside. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven... the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh* said Jesus, inexplicably, a few weeks back...

Is he beginning a new Exodus? The rabbis teach that the Messiah who comes on the night of the Passover will be a new Moses, will bring with him the Manna – which they say is the bread of heaven from the beginning of the world, before the Fall of Adam and Eve – before everything went wrong. And that therefore the return of the manna is a kind of return to Eden. You'll find the manna in me, he is saying, and I will take you home, to where *all things are made new.*

He did tell us he was the Gate, and he would take us to the Garden.

There is that smile again, even through the tiredness, and the tears. He takes the cup... The sacrificing of the Passover Lamb is an essential at the Passover feast. Reminding of the Exodus Lamb, that protected the people from the Angel of Death. The blood that was painted on the lintel – on the door – on the gateway to each home

This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many...

Take this, he says, and drink it....

But he does not drink it himself...

I shall not drink of the vine again until the kingdom of God comes, he says, ... and he gives it to us...

Why is he not drinking it... ? And ... His blood? His blood? Poured out?

My blood....

The historian Josephus recorded that in one year there were 256,000 lambs sacrificed at the Temple, and their blood poured out, literally, from bowls over the altar. It is hard to imagine, quite *how much blood* was poured out at Passover, but here in this room, in this moment, it is impossible to forget. I am the protection, I am the gate, I am the Passover Blood, he is saying. We are not talking about a cup of wine here, a finger-prick test.... It's impossible not to know what Jesus means – about blood poured out – given as entirely as that perfume Mary smashed and poured over his feet ... except... *it makes no sense, surely*. But in this moment, it is very real.

.... after all this, we wait, to see what Jesus will do next... but what he does, is what we always do – he chants the great thank offering – what our Greek brothers and sisters call the Eucharista – psalm 118. Yet in the words of our Gate, our Lover, our Servant, our... Lamb ... we hear it newly.

*When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord;
he brought me into a spacious place.
The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
The Lord is with me; he is my helper.
Out of my distress I called to the Lord;*

*the Lord answered me and set me free ...
I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.*

This is the gate of the Lord....

and so we wait, for Jesus to drink the final, the fourth cup of the meal is drunk, that signals the end of the Passover feast, the completion of the sacrifice ...

But... no! After he sings the hymn, he gets up and leaves...

we go out,

out into the night,

and the final cup of completion is not yet drunk...

Jesus says... let us go back to the garden... back to the apple, back to where it all went wrong. And let's begin again. And this time... I'll take the fall for you. With you.

Suddenly the Passover room disappears, and we are back in the garden....

After the Communion...

And the Passover room disappears and we are back in the garden... there is the burning bush, still burning... God hearing the cry of his people, ready to deliver us from our slavery. We follow the Lamb, deeper into the garden amongst the trees.

Wait here, he says...

And in the distance, a little way off we see an apple tree – or is it an olive? It is hard to tell in this light, with the light of the burning bush reflecting on its leaves. Hard to tell on this night, as apple trees and burning bushes and olive trees become one, as love pours itself out, and draws us behind him into the garden....

Jesus falls to his knees and prays... Father, If you are willing, take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours, be done...

This cup? What does he mean? The Fourth cup? The cup of completion?

Somehow in our hearts we know the truth... we are looking for the garden, for the new beginning – as the world hurtles along the corridors of power, battered and bruised as we are, with all our longings and our yearnings. And sometimes it feels like we can't even find the way in. Cast out of Paradise, with no way back. Exiled in a foreign land, where all is profit, exploitation, and loss of humanity.

But we know.... He will take us there, the Passover Lamb, making our sacrifice his own. Becoming the lamb for us, making the sacrifice for us. And becoming our manna, our gate, the way back to the garden.

In the distance, way beyond the olive-apple where he kneels, praying... lit by the furthest flames of the burning bush - we see another tree. A fourth tree, cross shaped against the horizon –

And we know the fourth cup will be drunk there, as he accepts the wine to moisten his lips... and says

It is finished...

and the Passover completed.

Who shall I tell them sent me? asked Moses.

I AM who I am was the reply.

Is this the man, they ask, bursting into the garden to arrest him.

I AM he ... is the reply.

The one in whom all ends become a beginning, all who are lost are found, and all who are oppressed, set free...

Tonight, Jesus enters into our night of pain. Into our Passover. And far ahead... we glimpse the dawn of Easter. And we know... we know that he will take us there.

Because he is the gate to the Garden that we could not find. He is the lover who washes us clean. He is the Lamb... who takes the journey we cannot do alone, and brings us with him. He is the Bread, the blood... the life within us, poured out for our renewal, for our protection, that even though the angels of death do come – in so many ways in this broken world ... we do come through

Today, Jesus meets us in the Passover meal. He takes us back to the start of Creation, back to the Garden of Eden, back to when everything went wrong... and he meets us in the garden there, and takes all that on his shoulders. He pours himself out for us, offering his love to absorb all of our hurt.... and promises us that he will be always with us. That the love that meets us in the garden of tears can lead us back to the garden of Eden, meet us in all that has gone awry, wash us in tears, pour love and life over us, and begin anew....

Let us go to the garden with him.

