

Is It I?

And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

– Mark 14:18-19 –

Self-examination is critical to spiritual life and growth. It is a difficult work, however. Much of the flesh resides with us throughout the days of our pilgrimage. Our sinful self would rather we quickly justify our actions and dismissively excuse our motives than to spend any time in penetrating introspection. This spiritual discipline of inward reflection requires humility, honesty, and a candid openness to undesirable findings, as well as an ardent desire to be more like Jesus.

The disciples were around the table that night of the Lord's supper. The Master had greatly desired to eat this Passover with them. There was something different about Him tonight, though. His actions were comparatively melancholic and solemnly intentional, and His words even more pregnant with instruction than usual. His washing of their feet in basest humility? His prophecy that He would not commune with them again until drinking of the new wine in Kingdom? And then, this alarming utterance, "One of you that eateth with me shall betray me."

What would it have been like to be there at that moment? How many of us would begin to look about the table, suspecting we knew him of whom Christ spoke? It has to be Matthew. Once a publican, always a publican. I never did trust his testimony – all a show. But, no, no, wait. It's more likely Thomas. That doubter never did really believe the Lord. Though, it could also be Peter, right? All that bravado, but the man is really a coward at heart, and we all know it. Oh, but then there's also James and John, with their thunderous tempers, never really understanding what spirit they are of. Simon Zealotes is another candidate. He's been looking for vengeance against Rome, and must be sorely disappointed with Jesus' taciturn position with regard to Israel's servitude. Yes, it must be him.

Unfortunately, I can see myself with such thoughts had I been present in the upper room that evening. Can you as well? How foolish we often are! Let us learn here a most necessary and fundamental lesson from the disciples' example. This was their shining moment of the pre-Resurrection gospel history. It doesn't appear that any of them suspected the other, but rather all understood each their own frailty. They finally apprehended what the Master had been teaching them the last three years, and in His presence, they laid bare their hearts, to Christ and to each other, lovingly believing the best about their brethren while openly acknowledging their own weakness and their personal propensity toward spiritual failure. THIS is self-examination, THIS is spirituality. And because of THIS inward attitude, the Spirit could begin to work just a few months later amongst and through these men to turn the world upside down. Let us strive to emulate such honesty of heart. -- D. Murcek