**Holy Week: what is our invitation this year?**

At the start of holy week we read of a woman who, uninvited, breaks into a gathering of men at table, drops to her knees to pour the most extravagant oil onto the feet of the man she loves, wiping the oil in with her hair! There is no shame or apology, even though those observing are self-righteously indignant, angered by her 'display'. She is not hedging her bets but is utterly there in love. How interesting that this scene, after Palm Sunday, will lead us into Holy week (Luke:7:37). We are not invited as strangers, but as intimates.

How close can I come this year? Can I draw close to another, let anyone really draw

close to me?

Nothing is asked of us, nothing at all, but we may know the quickening, the longing not to be far away. I hear some say, who are outside of their faith, that they wonder about the meaning of their lives at this time. They feel hollow, holiday and Easter eggs are not doing it. The thread to the divine is there, but distant, not a personal, intimate thing.

A woman I love faces a terminal illness, she has no control over the time line, she trusts the doctor looking after her, but more I feel the inward turning, her abiding trust in her God, and her desire to look out for the needs of her loved ones. Those who love her will gather and many things will help, food and company, but this death is not ours, but hers. It is not about my grief and loss. Will I interfere and shore myself up? Probably, but I know howshe loves me.

During Holy week we walk with Jesus, it is not our death, but then this may involve no less than everything. Keats talks about a 'negative capability', 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties. Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' It is our habit to be at the centre, in control, regulating the distance, not falling. To trust and relinquish requires Grace.

Jesus will surrender entirely to his death. The days from Palm Sunday to Good Friday will be his, and we will watch his betrayal, his humility, his utter dependence, his fear. How close can we come to this, where do we stand as we watch and listen?

Can we dare to believe that God speaks directly to us, through the other and their

suffering, flushing out our fears and loneliness? Our belief is confirmed in our culture, that my life is in my hands, I have control. Yet I know the taste of betrayal and humiliation.

This man whom I love shows me what it is to trust.

Love is something most of us only scratch at. It is usually about us, we, and our fears are in the centre. This seems natural, until we taste a love that is other.

This year as we hear the stories of the Passion, how will God touch us? Who will we find ourselves knowing, understanding, pulling away from?

Is it the mother who watches, her child a part of her, helpless to protect what she loves most?

Or the apostles: those who love in their flawed ways, unable to bear the truth, behaving badly, too frightened and uncomprehending?

Or a bystander, a watcher, an evaluator of what the crowds will permit, frightened to come near. Who am I to come near, what can I do?

Perhaps inside we are drawn close, our heart is being softened and awakened, but we tremble before the choice, because there is a choice, made over and over. A very deep choice.

Or is this too intimate? Too many bodies, women loving so exuberantly, dropping and kissing feet, those wanting to be close, touching him, laying a head to his chest, and he loving and tending them all in the deepest and most intimate way. His physical death, so painful, excoriation, lack of any dignity but his own. Does our physical nature frighten us when bodies and their expression can go so wrong, yet we long to be near?

This is the Passion, the story of lavish love, it is not just a distant theological journey but our story, our encounter with ourselves as human beings and our God who loves us.

Whichever role we take or not, we will find that after the whole ghastly event, the loss and the emptiness, that we we turned around, turned into the light, turned to see sky that opens and about us immeasurable beauty and simplicity. Humans, loving and working together, bringing life and care to the world around them.

Perhaps we too will find ourselves walking a road with a 'stranger' who listens and waits, and our bones will rest, feeling their presence. Or a breeze will touch our cheek, opening our eyes to creation and God's presence, always there, always there for us.

This is his dying for us all, and his living in us now.