Over the past few weeks I have been watching the 1970s movie of Jesus Christ Super Star and it has been very confronting. The first time I ever heard any of the music from this musical was when I was about 7 or 8. My parents took us to the drive in and after the ‘kids’ movie, all us kids climbed into the back of the station wagon, where mum had made a bed for us – and we were supposed to go to sleep. My parents then watched Jesus Christ Super Star.

I remember having a soundtrack of the music which we played on the record player… and I remember the power of the songs.

But what has struck me as I watched the movie in instalments some 45 years later, was how close to the biblical account of Holy week the story is – even if the musical takes the perspective of Judas rather than one of the Gospel writers.

The other confronting image is that the movie is filmed in Israel/Palestine with the obvious components of an occupied land – there are tanks and riffles – it is noisy -and for some reason this increases the intensity of the references by Jesus to a’ Kingdom which is not of this world’.

So as I come to the readings for Maundy Thursday, which are the same every year – I come with images of a desert landscape, of noise and different voices, and a cast that are sunburnt, and images of a land that is at war, and a people who are oppressed – but who follow and embrace the hope of a fragile and vulnerable Jesus.

Because Judas narrates the musical, we see Jesus as Judas sees him. A man of convictions and the promise that they will be saved – but Judas also sees Jesus pain, his fragility and even his exhaustion that God’s message of love is not being received.

Every year during Holy Week and Easter we listen to the same stories, though often from different perspectives – but on Maundy Thursday the accounts are always the same.

First in Exodus, we hear the story of the first Passover and the promise that God will protect God’s people, a people who have been oppressed.

Then in Corinthians, the account of the Last Supper in the first century, which is almost word for word the same practice we maintain 2000 years later.

And then our Gospel reading Jesus washes the disciples feet and then commands them to ‘love one another’ as they celebrate Passover.

It has made me wonder does Jesus speak out of vulnerability or promise or maybe both. How do we hear the stories of these days?

For our Jewish neighbours Passover began at sunset yesterday and it lasts until next week. And the patterns of our celebrations have much in common. Each year we both recount the stories of our faith and hope that we will learn something new about ourselves and about God.

One of the features of the Passover which for me is very powerful is the Seder in which the story of the Passover from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land is retold – often with questions posed by the younger members of the family. But also with the singing of songs and the sharing of symbolic foods – before the actual feast – looking for signs of God. Not unlike our own practices as we journey between Maundy Thursday until Easter Sunday’s Feast.

The story of the Passover in Exodus is a very painful story to hear because at one level it is the story of genocide – but it is also a story of hope and rescue. It is a hard story hear, and it is even a harder story to understand.

Watching Jesus Christ Super Star reminded me that the stories of our faith bear with them so much of the pain of our human experience, but they are part of our shared history –and one that informs how we understand our relationship with God.

The story of the Passover, and its traditions become the basis for which we encounter the Last Supper – even down to the liturgical context of the event. Just as the Passover story is retold liturgically every year, Jesus too introduces a liturgical practice to his followers that will continue as an act of covenant and promise for us event today. And in Jesus act too we have the revelation of God in our midst – an image that God has acted and continues to act within creation.

The challenge for us in this triduum – the next three days of Holy Week and Easter – is to be aware of God acting – not just in the stories that we hear – but also being vigilant for how God is at work now in our midst, and in the world.

This morning at the Cathedral as I was struck by Bishop Sarah’s sermon. She reminded us of the vulnerability of Mary washing Jesus feet, and of Jesus own pain. She invited us to not be afraid of our own emotion, or to rest into Jesus in these times. In her Easter message she remind us of the experiences of the different voices in the stories of Holy Week – the different intentions – the different desires – and making space to be open to hearing where God’s voice is within all the noise.

As we retell these stories tonight and in the coming days, the danger is we only hear noise, rather than the still quiet voice of God seeking us to be all God desires us to be.

In the way that John tells the story of Jesus we can only assume that Jesus knew what was coming, who would betray him, that he would be alone when it mattered most. Knowing these things about his friends and disciples Jesus doesn’t rant – rather he chooses an act of love. The action of God is not to respond with aggression, but in grace. For those who knew the historical context of the Passover in the first centuries will have made this link of the presence of God’s grace. Jesus washes the feet of those who are his disciples, but also the feet of those who will reject him. It is a powerful image of intimacy, but also an image of responding to evil and pain; of silence and noise.

In the face of the weakness and pain of others, when we want to see the worst of humanity (as Judas did) – God reveals the possibility of love and grace. This is what we can see in the acts we will share in tonight – in the washing of each other’s hands, in the sharing of the Last Supper together; in the reminder from Jesus to ‘love one another’; in the walking with Jesus to the garden and in the sitting and praying together with Jesus for the grace of God to be revealed in the world. All these actions are part of hearing the story, or breathing with Jesus; but they are equally about the voices we choose to hear now and how we honour and recognise God’s action now.

The closing scene of Jesus Christ Super Star reveals two emotions : grief and love. And they may be emotions we will encounter in the journey of the next few days.

Love is at the heart of all that is happening this weekend – for it is Love which God longs for us to welcome and experience– such a simple word and such a difficult action for us to embrace.

And God’s love for us is so great, the story exposes the vulnerability of grief which comes with loss and love.

Jesus commands us to love - but True love cannot be commanded because true love first requires moving beyond one's own desire’s and even our own self perceptions. We are often drawn to love those who will buy into our own justifications; to those who hear or say the same words we do. But the love of God’s Kingdom is beyond this – because we are all drawn – just as we are.

As we observe these most solemn days – may we have the courage to listen beyond the noise and the voices and find the stillness of God’s voice; may we have the courage to look beyond what occupies us, and to not be overwhelmed by the dust of our journey. And may we find the space to rest in God, to breath in, and know God is here with us. Amen.