

Maundy Thursday Reflection 2023

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Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Lord, may the fragrance of our worship draw us closer to your open heart; through Jesus Christ, the passion of God. Amen.

Tonight I'm drawn to reflect more than preach. This time is such a solemn time.

You could feel it in the air as we sang our post communion hymn, last Sunday, "Were you there when the crucified my Lord?"

And I'm sure we will feel it later when, we sing those words once more.

These days leading up to Easter seem custom made for contemplation and quiet.

The story told on Maundy Thursday doesn't lend itself to gift giving or even Shrove Tuesday type pancake suppers.

Between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, Jesus is betrayed and handed over to the authorities by one of his own.

Peter, denies knowing him not once, not twice, but three times.

Jesus is brutally treated and condemned to an inhumane and unimaginable death on a cross.

I sometimes wonder what sort of mind thought up crucifixion. (Pause)

When I was a little girl, I always wished it could all stop with Maundy Thursday.

There were likely some particularly graphic images I hadn't been able to unsee.

It's a terrible story of betrayal by loved ones, horrific pain, humiliation and sacrifice.

But if you were here on Sunday, you might remember Pastor Katlin's words in her sermon, "New life does not spring forth without death.

We cannot skip the truth of what happened to the one we loved no matter how much we want to fast forward through the suffering."

So I invite you to join me in reflecting, this solemn night, on the themes that I've been thinking about: Love, forgiveness, service, and The Last Supper.

Before we begin with our first reflection, let's take a moment with the word, Maundy. That's not a word rolls off the tongue. It's not a word we use everyday.

What does it mean? In case you didn't know, the word Maundy comes from the latin, 'mandatum', or 'command'.

In this context, we refer to the instructions Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper.

From Mandatum, we get the English word, "Mandate" which we think of as an official order or commission to do something.

Jesus gives the disciples his official order, his commission to love in his final words in the Gospel just proclaimed with these words:

"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Also, you may not have noticed that until this point in John's Gospel, the author never states that Jesus loved his disciples.

We are all familiar with John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

But that's about God's love for the whole world. On this night, it's not the world or Israel or Jerusalem or Bethlehem he is talking about.

Jesus talks about his love for those in the room with him. In this Gospel, love is taken to a much more

personal level.

Which brings us to my reflection on love.

Heavenly Father: Teach us to Love.

I once heard a sermon preached by one of the priests at Trinity Wall Street in New York. I don't remember which one but the story has always stayed with me.

He said his words were not from the Bible and have no historical basis what so ever but it is a story that he likes to tell on Good Friday so forgive me for leaping a day ahead.

I'll do my best to repeat it from memory.

After Jesus's crucifixion, and the horror of that day, people are starting to leave for their homes. The grief of those who'd known and loved Jesus is unbearable.

The women who'd been gathered at the foot of the cross, suddenly realize they can't find Mary, the mother of our Lord.

In all the confusion, the group had become separated. The women she had been with search through the dark night, calling out "Mary". "Mary". But they can't find her anywhere.

The women are unable to sleep because they are frantic with worry and comfort one another through the long night.

As dawn breaks, the women are back out on the dusty streets searching for Mary when they look up and suddenly though the dawn light and they see a woman approaching.

Could that be Mary? As the woman comes closer, they realize it is Mary. They run to her, calling her name and crying tears of relief.

"Mary. Mary. Where were you? We couldn't find you. We were so worried."

Mary opens her arms wide to hold them and says: "It's alright. I'm just fine. I was with Judas's mother. She needed me." Which brings me to my reflection on forgiveness.

Saviour Christ: Teach us to Forgive

During Jesus's time people thought of hands and feet as areas of the body that symbolized offensive human activities.

In washing the feet, the offensive deeds that were done, would be washed away. Also, the streets were filthy and your feet would have tracked through all sorts of muck and debris.

So the lowliest household servants would be assigned the task of washing the feet of visiting guests. How shocking it must have been for the disciples for Jesus to take on this task. But he knew this act of kindness would draw them closer together.

All of the disciples were there which means Judas was there. Knowing what Judas was about to do, Jesus lowered Himself, moved his garment aside and may have lovingly washed Judas's feet too.

Foot washing on this night in particular was an act of love and forgiveness.

Did you know that is why the deacon's stole is worn to the side? It symbolizes Jesus moving his garments to the side to wash the disciples feet. Which brings me to my reflection on service.

Holy Spirit: Send us out into the world to serve:

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen says: "Our service serves us as well as others. That which uses us strengthens us.

Over time, fixing and helping are draining, depleting. Over time, we burn out. Service is renewing.

When we serve, the work itself sustains us." End quote.

Service is renewing. Service strengthens and renews us. Have you ever done something for someone without expecting anything in return?

Maybe you didn't even want to do it but you just felt so fulfilled afterwards and happy you did. That's the Holy Spirit at work.

The Last Supper:

Because of the way The Last Supper is typically depicted, we think of it as all of the disciples seated on one side or the other of the table with Jesus at the center.

Well, let's go into the upper room together and seat ourselves in front of the table, facing Jesus and the disciples and observe.

We have heard these words spoken so often that they've become a part of our DNA, " Drink this, all of you:"

This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me." Imagine their feelings hearing those words.

Jesus knew that once his early life ended, these words would keep him close to his disciples, bringing him back into their presence and today into ours.

During my time at The Episcopal School for Deacons in Berkeley, one of my professors brought a simple, pen and ink drawing of Jesus seated at the table, with the disciples, passing a piece of bread to the person next to him and that person passed the bread to the next.

The table extended through the ages with people sharing communion up to today.

It reminds us that people just like us broke bread with Jesus.

Not only are we connected with and sharing this meal with Christians past and present but someday we will share this same connection with Christians yet to come.

With this simple meal, we are nourished in body and soul to do the work he has given us to do. That is to be his hands, his feet and his heart in the world. (Pause)

I once heard a story about a young man who was taking the subway home after worshipping at his church.

He sat down in a seat, popped in his headphones and closed his eyes. Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

The woman next to him was trying to get his attention.

He unplugged his earphones so that he could hear what she was saying.

She said, "Young man, young man. "

"Yes" He answered.

She said, "Young man. You... smell like church."

I hope that when each one of us leaves here today and every time we worship here and exit those doors that we too leave smelling like church. Amen.