

Maundy Thursday

March 29, 2018

Welcome and Lord's Prayer (Jim)

Welcome to worship. Here is a table around which a story will be told. In the background, in the shadows, whispers will be passed that speak of betrayal. Rulers and anti-rulers will conspire with the darkness to break the man of light. Religious leaders and empire builders and puppet kings will work together to crush the dream of hope. People who he trusted and loved will be confused, in denial, possessed by fear, and perhaps too tired to care.

As the world turns to trap him, Jesus does one more thing that opens God's love: he breaks bread and shares the cup. As the darkness builds around him, the light of this story casts its brilliance down through the centuries for those who dare to hope. We begin in prayer together, using the ancient prayer once again, saying.... *Our Father, who art in heaven...*

Invitation to Confession

The Prophet Joel speaks about the tearing of cloth as an act of confession and a cry for help before God. As we pray about those times we have not measured up, and those places where we need God's help, may we come to know all barriers between us and God being torn apart. *Let us pray together...*

Assurance of Pardon & Passing the Peace

Christ offers forgiveness and welcomes us to the table of grace and plenty where all the faithful gather. This is the Good News that brings new life, and we thank God for it.

Jesus said, *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Friends, you are now free to greet each other with a sign of that love.

Reflection

Jesus has gone to Jerusalem for the Passover. He's gathered his twelve disciples there at the table. Did he know what was going to happen?

Did he realize that by the end of the night one of them will betray him to the authorities? Did he know one will deny him three times, and that in the end every last one of them will leave him alone in his hour of greatest pain?

And yet, there he is. Getting down on his knees and washing their feet, Breaking the bread and pouring the cup. Eating with them. Laughing with them. Blessing them. Showing them his love and grace and compassion, at a time when we might have better understood his anger or disappointment.

In a world where we are surrounded by messages of retaliation, or vengeance, or 'an eye for an eye' cries for justice, his was a different message.

Jesus had done nothing wrong. He'd lived a life of non-violence, he'd healed the sick, raised the dead, and freed the captives. He'd brought hope and life to those who needed it the most.

And in the end, he knew that he was not about to be thanked. No. He was about to be killed. Because in the end, the goodness, and the kindness, and the compassion he brought were more of a threat to the Roman authorities, and the clergy of his day, than any weapon could ever be.

He so radically upset the status quo that they decided their only choice was to make him go away in the most brutal way possible.

But on the night before, he wasn't running away. He wasn't preparing for a battle. He wasn't plotting his revenge. Instead he was with the ones he loved most. The ones who loved him, but who weren't perfect. The ones who knew who he was, and what he had done, who made their own mistakes yet would be the witnesses to his life after he was gone.

And that's where that word "maundy" comes in. Because what do you do if you're Jesus? What do you do if you know you are not going to be around much longer, and you have to tell the people you love the most, the ones who followed you, the ones who sometimes make big mistakes, how to keep moving in the right direction after you're gone?

The word "maundy" comes from a Latin word: *mandatum*. And *mandatum* means "mandate" or a "commandment". So when we talk about "Maundy Thursday" we're really talking about "mandate Thursday". We're talking about the night that Christ told his disciples exactly what he expected of them.

If Jesus was some kind of box-office superhero, you might think his mandate would be something like "avenge me" or "don't let them get away with this!" But it's not. The mandate, the mandatory thing Jesus tells them to do is simply this:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. 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."

It's the beginning of a story about what happens when the world does its worst through violence, and hatred, and fear, and yet love wins anyway.

It's a story of love that was rejected and buried, and yet was still too strong to stay in the ground.

It's not my job to rename Christian holy days... but if it were, I might change the name of this night. I might change it from this word that none of us really knows anymore to something we would all remember, like: "Love One Another Thursday", or "The Last Thing Christ Really Wanted Us to Know Thursday".

Because this is a message we all need to hear and remember, again and again. We don't need to hide it behind fancy terms. We don't need to just check it off as another thing to do this week. We need to remember that this is how Christ said other people would know us: *by how we love one another*.

And maybe if we always had that reminder, if we always had that commandment to love in the front of our head, Christ's dream for us really would come true.

Tonight as we eat this bread and drink this cup, as simple as it seems on the outside, know that we are choosing no less than to feast upon Christ's love for us, and to bring that feast to others. If every Christian would do that, no one would ever have to ask us who we follow. By our love, they would already know. Amen.

(walk down to the table)

Communion

They didn't understand his way. They didn't understand all that he taught but when it came time to share in the Passover feast, they turned to Jesus. On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples asked, *"Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"*

So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, *"Take; this is my body."* Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

We give thanks to you, God for the love that is poured out on this table. May the bread and cup sustain us to follow your will. Amen.

Tonight we will practice communion by intinction, which means when you approach the table you will receive a piece of bread to dip in the cup. We invite the choir to approach first, then the Tenebrae readers, then everyone. If you would like us to come to you please raise your hand.

Come. Find your place at this table, you who need answers, you who came looking for peace.

Please join with me in the Unison Prayer of Thanksgiving...

God, we thank you for the gift of life you have given us through this meal. Help us to remember your Son's betrayal and sacrifice as we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes again with peace, when all your children may feast united together. Amen. (walk to Narthex for the readings)