

April 1, 2021
Maundy Thursday
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He loved them to the end.

John's Gospel opens with revelation: The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. Throughout this Gospel, we see people encounter Jesus and slowly move from Darkness to Light, from not understanding to realization. Like those who walked with Jesus 2000 years ago, we become witnesses to the Divine Signs, the crumb trail, Jesus leaves for us to know Him and believe.

In this Maundy Thursday reading from John's Gospel, we see a poignant final meal among Jesus and his disciples. When this meal concludes, Jesus' suffering begins. Only Jesus is aware that this is his final meal on earth.

Jesus isn't dining at some quaint restaurant with a 5-star menu. He is dining with his friends, those who've have walked with him during this 3-year ministry. They have come to know Jesus well. They were with him when he learned that his friend Lazarus died. They saw him weep. Jesus knows the heartache of human death. He knows how his friends will soon feel.

But, now, they're all enjoying a meal together. Judas is among them. The text tells us that Jesus knows what Judas will do this night.

During supper, Jesus gets up from the table, takes off his outer robe, and ties a towel around himself. In that gesture, he takes off the clothing of a Teacher and puts on the towel of servant. For those of us who have the benefit of reading the full Gospel, we see a repeating theme. The Word, God, empties Godself and takes on human flesh to dwell among Creation. The Teacher empties himself of status and privilege and takes up servanthood.

Peter, bless his heart, is undone. The Messiah, the one who will rescue Israel, has no business kneeling on the dirty floor, washing dusty feet. What is Jesus thinking? When Jesus comes to Peter's feet, he says, "no way." I get what Peter is saying. In my lifetime, there have been a few special mentors. People who have truly influenced my life. It's hard for me to imagine one of them kneeling in front of me, washing my feet after a long day of hiking. Like Peter, I would be much more comfortable washing their feet.

Peter sees Jesus through the lens of his own life and culture. Whatever Peter understands in this moment, it pales to reality. Jesus says to him, "unless I wash you, you have no share with me".

The COVID pandemic seems to be reaching a conclusion. When it was beginning, Richard Rohr remarked in one of his daily meditations, "We're in the midst of a highly teachable moment". It was as if Rohr recognized the human trauma headed our way...

that epic moments in history are opportunities to learn....about ourselves, our relationships with others, and our relationship with God.

Into the pressure cooker of 2020, we added a virus with no known vaccine, a presidential election, more than 500,000 deaths related to the virus, loss of jobs, loss of small businesses, imposed quarantines, restrictions on gathering with family, church, classrooms...

It didn't get any better when we rang in the new year. 2021 welcomed riots in Washington DC, an arctic storm brought the great State of Texas to its knees. And without even a whisper of ceremony, the Episcopal Church lost the majority of its assets in our diocese. We even lost the right to call ourselves the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth.

On this Maundy Thursday, five Episcopal parishes gather to celebrate Jesus' last meal knowing that they must vacate their facilities next week.

All of this grief and extraordinary waste caused by the ideological differences between a bishop and his denomination.

For Episcopalians, this is a "highly teachable moment".

George Burns is given credit for the line, "Love is a lot like a toothache. It doesn't show up on X-rays, but you know it's there."

So, absent an X-Ray, I circled back to Jesus' last meal, looking for signs of his love.

First, I saw radical hospitality practiced. Judas is among the disciples present for this meal. The others may not know what will happen tonight, Judas may not even know what will happen tonight. But, Jesus *does* know. And, he welcomes Judas to this Table.

Second, I saw foot washing. Why does Jesus do this particular thing on this particular night?

Foot washing changes us. It is an intimate moment of sharing vulnerability and love—an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. In the Gospel of John, foot washing is sacramental.

When Jesus kneels to wash feet, he washes the feet of Judas. And Peter. He loves the one who will betray him *and* the one who will deny him. He loves them, all of them, *to the end*.

And then he gives the disciples, and us, a new commandment, to love one another as he has loved us.

We are called to love one another in spite of our grievances and differences.

We are called to love the one who must leave the parish at which he has worshipped for a lifetime *and* we are called to love the one who took away the parish through a legal proceeding.

We are called to welcome everyone to God's Table and to extend this table into the world. We are called to feed people, knowing that some will bite the hand that feeds them.

The cross that Jesus invites us to take up is the cross of Love. But as I experience this Maundy Thursday with all the loss suffered by my denomination, I see with fresh eyes the radical hospitality of Jesus. He did not take up this cross for himself, but for the brokenness of Creation, of you, and of me. He did not do this in anger or disappointment. He did this with vulnerability, compassion, and a radical welcome for all.