



MAUNDY Thursday

Let us pray: Ever gracious God, we gather this evening hour as friends gathered with Jesus in an upper room long ago. We come bearing the marks of a bitter and broken world. We come from anonymous places, with dry and thirsty spirits. Refresh us and make us whole with the cup of forgiveness. Draw us near to each other in mutual service and closer to you in the covenant of faithfulness and thanksgiving. As the night advances, deepen in us a sense of your steadfast love for us in Jesus Christ, our friend and redeemer. **Amen.**¹

This is the service in which we expressly remember the mandate of Christ to those gathered with him in the upper room. Take this bread. Drink this wine. Through these acts and with these fruits of the earth and human labor, remember that I have been with you and I will be with you to the end of the age, says Christ.

Re-member. To put back together. To bring the past into the present and send it on into the future. Re-member. To remember is to bring into your consciousness something of importance. When we were preparing for the General Ordination Exams, the dean of our seminary said: Do not be afraid that you don't know something; that you didn't learn something you need to write an acceptable answer. You know what you need to know. You just have to bring it forward from your memory. That was comforting.

We know what we need to know. We simply have to bring it forward into our consciousness. We know that Jesus, on this night, was gathered with his disciples in an upper room. They gathered to eat and drink a meal together. They had shared many meals before- and some or perhaps even all but Jesus- knew that this meal would be something special. The same and yet different.

This meal would be their last meal together. And Jesus takes the bread – blesses it- breaks it- and shares it with them: This is my body, given for you. Whenever you do this, do this in remembrance of me.

After supper, Jesus takes the cup and after he blesses it, he passes it to each of them with similar words: This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink this, do it in remembrance of me.

For many of us, at funeral receptions or family meals, we have certain traditions. We have certain foods – indeed one of the things most likely to lead to hurt feelings or even arguments is to change what we eat on Easter or Thanksgiving or Christmas. You can sometimes add to the tried-and-true menu but it's hard to do away with something that's always been on the table! Holidays with special ties to food and family traditions. Memories of family tied to certain foods or gatherings.

¹ Ruth Duck, ed. Touch Holiness, 65.

Although we will not wash feet tonight, it is an important reminder that Jesus never asked his disciples to do what he was not willing to do. And Pope Francis, continuing his departure from predecessors who were not always comfortable with ordinary folks, is washing the feet of those with disabilities. A physical and symbolic reminder that we are each God's children – even the least of those among us. We are each worthy of God's love. We are each important to the world as created by God.

Why are some of us so anxious about having our feet washed? It's more anxiety producing than passing the peace to people you don't know: shake hands, hug or kiss. What to do when you don't know the person sitting next to you. Feet can be and often are smelly and dirty. And yet, without the feet, we couldn't walk upright.

We lose our balance when our feet don't work right. And our feet are hardy and strong in some ways and weak and vulnerable in other ways. Did you know that nearly 25% of the bones in your body are located in your foot? That's just one measure of how important the feet are to our ability to function in our everyday world. And certain diseases attack the feet and greatly impact our ability to get around, to stand or balance.

The complaint is often heard that "I don't want my feet washed because they are ugly." Well, what's ugly if it was created by God? Sounds a bit like pride getting in the way of the lesson Jesus taught. The lesson, boiled down to its basics, is that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples to remind them and remind us that nothing is too much to ask of a servant of God in terms of caring for one another.

Not every behavior is excusable- poor behavior towards one another is a matter that Jesus deals with frequently. Washing of feet reminds both of us- the one whose feet are being washed and the one who is washing the feet- that we are to love one another, grubby and ugly feet and all. That we are to love one another when we share the bread and the wine.

We are to re-member the realm of God. To put back together, as best as we are able, and to show to each other the love that God has shown to us. Tonight, as we celebrate Eucharist, re-member the words of Christ, said on this night so long ago. Whenever you do this, do it in remembrance of me. Whenever you do this, remember that you are loved by God, grubby and ugly feet notwithstanding. Amen.