

Baring our Soles- Maundy Thursday 2018

Slide: Jesus Washing Feet

Every now and then, I have a memory of someone who has been gone for a very long time, sometimes I can't even think why it was I suddenly think of them. But then, I suppose when you grow up going to church, you have lots of memories of church, especially the church of your childhood. This week, when thinking about Holy Week, Vivian came to mind. Vivian was a very good friend of my Mother's, although I can remember going camping with Vivian and her husband Orlin some summers and sitting in their camper eating sardines. It was weird how they liked sardines. Stranger still is that I ate them and it often was the only time I did. Even funnier was how hilarious Orlin and Vivian were about being Norwegians and proud of it. They had more stories of Ole and Lena than I ever would have heard in the Midwest. I'm pretty sure I've heard all those jokes because of them and have likely heard them all. They were also the first to introduce lefse to me.

So, when looking and contemplating upon the Gospel reading for today, it's interesting to me that Vivian, a person who I likely have not thought of in some years, came rushing to mind. I remember a time when she fell and broke her pelvis and leg. This was after I married Jim, but before we moved away from the Seattle area. Her husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's by then and she was on her own, given that she could no longer care for him at home. I remember visiting her in the rehab facility where she was recuperating. She said something I will never forget and as a pastor now I remember was so helpful in understanding others who were elderly, ill or disabled. She said something like this:

"I have never had to learn humility like this before. I mean, I serve people - I quilt and serve meals at church, and I make casseroles for people who are in the hospital. I thought I was humble before. But, to be forced to be in the opposite position when you're proud. You know it's not just that I couldn't walk by myself or get out of bed without help. Sure, you would expect that. But, for Pete's sake (she said that a lot), I can't even wipe my

behind without help or pull my undies up. Do you know how hard it is to rely on a stranger like that when you have never had to before? I think I finally get it, what Peter must have felt like when Jesus washed his feet.”

Slide: Holy Thursday

When I was a kid, I always thought this day in Holy Week was called Monday Thursday. I concocted some weird notion that this Thursday was so bad for Jesus, that it felt like a Monday. I mean, everyone complains about Mondays and when no one explains to you what words mean, you make stuff up. So, when I was little, I tried my best to piece together what I could of Jesus’ last days until I got to be too old to feel like I could ask without feeling dumb. To be honest, up until Seminary, no one explained why it was called Maundy Thursday, not even the pastors I heard preach. And, before Wikipedia, I didn’t even really want to admit that I DIDN’T know what it meant. So, I just assumed it had something to do with Jesus’ last meal. After all, growing up, that’s what we mostly did on this night – celebrate Holy Communion. Never once did I encounter an actual foot washing as a child.

Yet, as important as the final supper is that Jesus shared with his closest friends, Maundy Thursday is not just about the Holy Communion, although communion is a big piece. After all, for us, it is a Sacrament and that is why we have it every week. But, the word Maundy is a Latin word that means mandate or commandment, but in this instance, the commandment to which Jesus is referring is “Love one another as I have loved you.” Maundy Thursday is the night where we remind ourselves once each year that Jesus gave us something new to do – to love one another, and this is how people will know us. But, Jesus doesn’t just tell us to do love one another. He shows us. To give an example of this, Jesus does show and tell – he washes feet. Jesus puts himself in a position no one else wants him to be in, doing the dirty job that in ancient times, the lowest of the low in the household did for those above them in station. Only slaves or servants washed the feet of guests or household members who came into the house. Just the idea of it really bothered Peter. He couldn’t fathom Jesus serving him like a slave.

Slide: I have given you a new...

But, here's what I think my friend Vivian came to know. Perhaps it wasn't only that Peter didn't want Jesus to wash his feet out of honor and dignity, that Jesus was too high to do this act. What if Peter didn't like having to admit he needed Jesus to do this act for him? Think about this. We live in a prideful society, too. Most of us are so independent, that to admit needing anything is often seen as weakness. Depending upon others is often frowned upon, or at least, we come to see often that asking for help is difficult. I see this all the time. And, I know this in my own life. I hate asking for help and let me tell you, when you live with a disorder where you have to, you hate it even more. Asking for help and admitting you can't do something is a humbling thing. And, no one wants to put themselves in a vulnerable and often intimate position of being served even and maybe especially when they need it.

Slide: Love One Another

And yet, this is at the heart of the commandment that Jesus gives. This new mandate is not about loving the neighbor as yourself, which God gave the ancient Israelite people who were rescued at Passover so long ago. This is a new command given by Christ, about loving EACH OTHER. Jesus knows he is about to leave the world. He is very concerned about his disciples and know they will need each other. He knows they will be huddled in the upper room after his death, afraid, and wondering if they have purpose. Jesus is desperate in his final hours to give them a way to be in community - to lean on each other, to trust each other, and to live fully in the life he gives them.

Slide: St. John's Prayer Room

It is an intimate act to wash feet. Yes. This symbolic act of humbling yourself at the bowl and towel is about us, together, supporting one another, for like the disciples, we scatter into the darkness from this place in service to the stranger and the neighbor, often in a Good Friday world, where violence, hatred and malice may thrive. We need this Maundy

Thursday, reminding us that we have a charge to be together in love, to take the bread and the cup together, to sing and confess together, and lastly to go, knowing that if we need help, this is the place and the people for which we can ask for it.

For here we bare our soles...and our souls. As the beautiful hymn proclaims: "Then take the towel, and break the bread, and humble us, and call us friends. Suffer and serve till all are fed, and show how grandly love intends to work till all creation sings, to fill all world, to crown all things."

This Maundy Thursday, let us take up the mandate to love, so that all people may know us by it. Amen.