

Maundy Thursday Sermon

Exodus 12:1-4[5-10]11-14 John 13:1-17,31b-35

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“We will call upon the Lord, our God,
as long as we live.” AMEN!

What is it about this special night
that brings people out?

This event happens every year.

It is the same text, the same songs,
the same sermon, the same prayers...

Preachers are charged with telling and
re-telling the “old, old story.”

The tension is do and say something new
pulled against sticking to the tradition that
Jesus is the same “yesterday, today,
and forever.”

Something “new” can be seen as heresy,
but doing the same old sermon, well,
then no one listens very well or for very long.

In the introduction to one of my journals
regarding the preaching on special occasions,
like Maundy Thursday,

there’s a story about “a bishop who had
the reputation for preaching
the identical sermon at every
confirmation service on his round
of visitations to parishes.

He was questioned about his
homiletical monotony, and cheerfully
responded that

“When people do what I’ve said in that sermon,
I’ll preach *another* one!”

His answer evoked half-hearted chuckles -
and internal winces.” (Pause)

So tonight, as we consider
the First Testament’s invitation
to always remember and celebrate
the Passover Meal,

alongside the text in 1st Corinthians
about the purpose and function of
the Lord’s Supper, we will want
to recognize the two great observances,

Passover and Holy Communion,
celebrated by two faith traditions
this time of year around the world...

Then, pause to see the truth of
how Maundy Thursday speaks loudly in
this sacred space.

Reminding us in the midst of all
the instability and turmoil of life,
in the familiarity and monotony of living,

we are invited to reflect on
our availability to God.

Tonight gives us permission to leave
room in our lives
for God to act in it. (Pause)

We look back and we wonder about what is ahead.

Tonight calls us to be in the present.

To stop, and breathe, and make an opening
for God to act in us.

The Passover Meal was about remembering
what God did and to tell the story,
around a meal, so those who weren't there
could see that God still is active.

"This shall be a day of remembrance for you.
Celebrate it as a festival to the Lord,"
(Exodus 12:14).

Tonight is also about remembering what Jesus did.

"This is my body that is for you.
This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this in remembrance of me,"
(1st Corinthians 11:25).

And know that Jesus Christ is still active.

We look back and wonder what is ahead,
the Spirit of God invites us into tonight and
the special moment of now. (Pause)

Tonight is also the night when Jesus did
something for his disciples that makes
many of us uncomfortable.

He washed his disciple's feet and charged them
with doing the same thing.

"For I have set you an example, that you
also should do as I have done to you." (Pause)

Don't worry, I do not believe that this is a call
for each of us to grab our towel and basin
and go out and wash everyone's feet!

(A collective sigh of relief!)

With John's gospel we always remember
to look at the larger and deeper meaning.

And in Jesus' example of washing
his follower's feet is for us to NOT
think ourselves better than we ought.

It might be to take on the servant
role of washing feet,
but it is certainly not limited to just that.

If we are in positions of distinction
we are to lower ourselves to serve others.

Jesus' new commandment to love
was about service and ministry to those
who have less.

To serve and slave to help
the ones society calls
servants and slaves.

To dwell with the outcast and forgotten.

If Jesus, the Lord and teacher,
exampled the role of servant,
then we can too. (Pause)

In the context of his example of taking
the role of the slave we notice that just before
we learned of Judas' betrayal and
then immediately after we are told
about Peter's denial.

In an amazing display of God's grace
both Judas and Peter allow their feet to
be washed.

Sometimes we forget that, and what

most of us always forget is that
before Jesus washed their feet,
his were washed.

By Mary,
in the presence of Lazarus the one
whom he raised from the dead,
in her home with Martha...

Mary anointed Jesus feet reminding us of
the mutual and reciprocating action of love. (Pause)

But, pastor, I don't want someone
washing my feet in church!

It is too intimate, too personal, too vulnerable.

We can relate to Peter's response,
"You will never wash my feet!"

I have said the same words, but still
I went to Maundy Thursday services because
the evening is significant enough
to bring people out.

And more and more, or perhaps bit by bit,
I came to understand the need inside me
to physically demonstrate my vulnerability. (Pause)

There's an old saying, "If you ever want
to know where you're heading take a look
to see where your feet are pointing." :-)

If it's not an old saying, then it should be! :-)

People's feet... they can tell a story.

Some are clean and well cared for, pedicured.

While others are twisted and worn,

with scrapes and cuts, and rugged toe nails.

But each of foot points in a particular direction.

Let's point ours toward God and
toward service and
toward vulnerability. (Pause)

It was a couple years ago, that I went to
see Ol' Bill for the last time.

When I opened the door to his residence at
Allegro he was halfway out of bed but
unable to stand on his own.

He saw me and said,
"Pastor, I need you to help me die."

I will never forget his command to me.

Thoughts of Dr. Jack Kevorkian
ran through my mind...

But that was not what Ol' Bill meant.

I gathered him back into his bed and
pulled his blanket up to his chest and
saw his feet were bare.

Now, Ol' Bill's feet... they could tell a story! :-)

I grabbed a pair of those comfy socks
that hospice had left for him and
gently gathered them up so I could
put them on his bare feet.

Immediately, there was a feeling of solace and
peace expressed in his breath when
the comfy socks were put on.

Then I did what Ol' Bill wanted,
I helped him to die as
I read the Psalms and prayed the prayers
for the dying.

I obeyed his command.

When we lower ourselves
we obey Jesus' command. (Pause)

Maybe that is what it is about this night
that brings people out.

The key to what Jesus was teaching his disciples,
and is teaching us...

that to be vulnerable is to let Christ come
and help us on the journey to serve others.

AMEN!