

## Maundy Thursday Sermon

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy One.

I remember the first hug I received after I was fully vaccinated in the early days of COVID. My granny had just passed away, and I couldn't travel back for her funeral, we were very close. A good friend of mine at Seminary walked up to me, saw the tears welling up in my eyes, and asked if it was ok to give me a hug. All I could do was nod in acceptance. She threw her arms around me, and I just burst out into tears. It was more than my grief for my granny. It was pent-up grief from the extended isolation from human touch. This was a grief I wasn't even aware I was carrying. As I hugged my friend, I realized so much was changing; so much had already changed. I was hugging my friend, still masked, still living in virtual isolation and uncertainty, but we knew we had each other and we knew we had that one moment of human connection.

While much has changed, I know I'm still finding my way through hugs and being in physical proximity to others while we gather while also working through the ongoing grieving process from a time of so much loss and change, and I think that's one of many reasons our Gospel text resonates so deeply for me.

In our text for this evening, we find Jesus at dinner with the disciples. He knows of Judas' betrayal and that Peter will deny him. Yet he goes about washing all of the disciple's feet and tells them to do the same for each other. Even as Peter questions and denies Jesus, we hear Jesus try to connect the pieces for his disciples while still acknowledging that they won't get it and will not understand what He has done for them until later. As Jesus goes about the process of washing their feet, he calls them into a different kind of relationship with each other. One of mutual love and care where they must not only know themselves as equals but also act as equals. This idea of knowledge leading to action manifests in Jesus' new commandment to the disciples as Jesus says to them. "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 a love for one another.”

And it is this kind of unique love that is translated as agape. And this is important to note. Because Agape isn't a feeling or knowing but an action a doing. To love as God loves. A kind of sacrificial love that in so many ways is aspirational, yet as Christ showed, the disciples exists in the simple act of washing feet. And through this action, Jesus reminds us that love is exemplified in simple actions and by the simple acknowledgment of the humanity of another in active love. In washing the feet of the disciples' Christ is showing us how to do the work he asks of us.

To give of ourselves in the ways we are able. To smile at a stranger in the street, say hello to the grocery checkout person, or extend kindness to someone we dislike or whose opinions may differ from our own. And To follow the example of Jesus and show love to one another, the kind of agape love that exemplifies God's love for us.

While I don't feel that this text is asking us to lay down our literal lives for each other as Christ did, I do see the Gospel calling us to

sacrifice our judgments and those things that keep us from truly loving one another in the agape sense of love. While this sounds much easier than it truly is, we can't lose sight of this very important work.

Letting things go that keep us from loving God and each other fully and actively working for justice in the world.

Standing here today in person with all of you as we again gather for this holy time, I'm reminded of that feeling of immense joy yet unavoidable grief. Still processing so much of what has happened over the last couple of years as we work through so many questions about what was, what is, and what is yet to come. I think that is why tonight's Gospel text continues to resonate so deeply for me. The disciples may not have known the fullness of what was happening, yet they may have had a sense of it.

All of our speculation about how they may have been feeling and how that led to their actions is simply that speculation, yet I choose to believe that their love for each other and their love for Jesus would have clued them into the worry and changes happening with their friend.

I wonder if the weight of the end of his time drawing near began to show on Jesus' face or in his voice.

Maybe as he says, "Where I am going, you cannot come"

For me it was in that statement that I could feel a sense of sadness for Jesus and his friends. And maybe as my friend did, the disciples would have offered Jesus an embrace. Maybe there are moments in this story that also resonate with you. I hope we can find time and space to share those moments with each other as we continue our Holy Week journey together.

And my prayer for us all is that this Holy act of foot washing, listening to each other and being present to the Holy Spirit in our lives as we continue this Holy Week journey together brings us closer as a community, closer to God, and closer to walking in the ways Christ has taught us. Amen