

Recently, I was talking with someone who'd visited St. Ben's for Sunday worship. They seemed pleased with their visit, they seemed satisfied with their experience of worship here, and of the liturgy. Yet something they said stayed with me: it was quite the show, they said, it was good theater. While I don't think for a moment that these comments were intended to be disparaging in any way, they did have me thinking about what the experience of worship in general, and in our tradition in particular, can all too easily become.

After all, just like theater, what we do here is all very intentional. We thoughtfully set the space, our skilled lectors follow the appointed readings for the day, their voices playing a key role, our prayers are something of a script we follow, we have set, intentional movements around the space, we have music and singing that emphasizes and amplifies the texts and tone of any given liturgy. There are moments to sit and to stand; to speak and to sing for solo voice and together...

What we do here, whenever we gather, can certainly be perceived as theater, as performance, can even be experienced as theater – like we're doing something here for an audience, even if that audience is just us.

But you might not be surprised to hear me say the liturgy isn't that. The liturgy isn't a show we put on, a show we co-curate each time we gather, it's not intended to be a performance for our enjoyment, or an experience for us to receive.

The liturgy is a reality that we, together, call into being; a sacred co-creation of intentional word and action; it's a way for us to participate in God's reality, to taste it, experience something of it, so we might carry that experience back out into the world.

In here, we share, with our whole selves, in the confident truths embedded in the liturgy, so that out there we might live more fully, faithfully, and fearlessly as Jesus' disciples. It's not prayer and action for its own self, but for what it enables us to become.

When Jesus knelt at his disciples' feet to wash them at the last supper, this would have been, without doubt, a moment of high drama. In that time and place, foot-washing was considered such a degrading task, that it was generally even beneath Jewish servants, and reserved only for those at the very bottom of the social hierarchy.

So Jesus' words and actions would have been pure drama. Jesus rolls up his sleeves, gets down on the floor, Peter recoils, we might imagine his horror at the action playing out in the room.

This is drama – but it's not theater. Jesus is using the drama of his body to live God's reality into being. Jesus loves, and he breaks down boundaries and barriers that're stopping the healing and life-giving flow of God's love in the world wherever he encounters them. Jesus, by his actions, reduces to nothing the social boundaries, the hierarchies, the fake obstacles that stand in the way of God's Kingdom reality. And because he does, it is drama.

Jesus doesn't just sit and say words to teach his followers, he uses the drama of his body to invite the ones he loves into a different reality. Using his whole self, his words and his *actions*, he enacts/actually *does* the new reality his life has ushered in, the Way he's offering to his disciples.

The invitation of this liturgy is not to re-enact what happened that night, but to affirm, with our whole selves, with our actual actions, that we, too, are willing to reduce to nothing those social barriers that still get in the way of God's Kingdom reality.

Are we willing to do what Jesus did, even as we notice our own discomfort at the thought of washing someone's feet, or worse, for many of us, the thought of someone washing our feet.

In this liturgy, Jesus is asking – what's in our way, what barriers still need to be broken down for *us* to really realize that we are one, we are one body? What still needs to be broken down for us to live love in the world in the way Jesus does it, fearlessly, and with his whole body.

Our Maundy Thursday ritual is not an 'act' of humility, it's not theater, it's a powerful ritual gesture that can be transformative, it can have us feel, in our whole embodied selves, the freedom of humility, and the power of caring and of being cared for by another.

"If you know these things," Jesus says, "you are blessed if you do them." If you do them.

Our liturgies aren't something we do to be moved by the theater of it all in here, they're the way we participate in an actual reality that has the power to transform us for the life we must live out there. The liturgy is not performance, it's formation.

If we love what we do here, but remain unchanged, it's like loving the words Jesus teaches and preaches but not living them; Jesus' Way is a life to be lived, not a set of ideas to be safely admired in and by the church.

Jesus' Way is the Way of the cross and we'll need courage, strength, conviction, and community to go where he leads. That's why we have liturgy.

Tonight we step into what the church has long called The Triduum, the Great Three Days; three powerful liturgies, across three days, given dramatic expression as one extended, connected act of worship. From the drama of the boundaries broken down at the table, to the boundaries broken down at the cross ... to the final boundary crossed and eternally smashed to bits in the truth of Resurrection: this drama isn't for us to consume as audience, but for us to willingly take into our ourselves that it might change us.

Jesus' self-giving, boundary-rupturing, world-reordering love will change the world if it is in us and lived into the world through us, lived into the world outside the walls of the church.

The liturgy is how we gather, pray, practice, and are formed, so that Jesus' story, more than something we re-enact in here ... so that Jesus' story is something we are willing to live out there.