

Sermon for Maundy Thursday, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Jesus was often found teaching from the tables where he shared meals with people. Gathering for a meal has always been central to our faith community, with Eucharist being that meal which is most precious to us. This year when we cannot have Eucharist in the context of the night of Jesus' betrayal, we might have a deep sense of loss. We have grown accustomed to Eucharist at this service, and every Sunday. Since the publication of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer Eucharist is our principle act of worship on the Lord's day. Now though, there are many of us who cannot recall the time when we received Eucharist only monthly, or even quarterly. So being unable to have Eucharist and then to strip the altar as part of our liturgy this year is hard.

Some priests are celebrating and even consuming the Eucharist, on behalf of their congregations and many find receiving communion spiritually to be a comfort. I have not had communion since the last time we prayed the Eucharistic prayer together here, on the Second Sunday in Lent when our Youth so beautifully led our worship. I have made the choice to fast from the Eucharist with all of you, receiving it spiritually as I worship with the WNC on Sundays.

But sharing a meal is only part of the story Jesus tells in John's gospel. Jesus not only fed his disciples, he also poured water into a basin and washed their feet. And the disciples were not at all receptive to this idea at first, just as many of us are not at all thrilled with the idea of foot washing as part of a Maundy Thursday service. Maybe some of us would be willing to wash the feet of our neighbor, but we are less likely to allow our neighbor to wash our feet.

Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and then he asks, "Do you know what I have done to you?" Can we answer that question? For that is really our work as disciples, to come to the answer, to begin to comprehend what it is Christ does for us, otherwise, how will we imitate Christ? Until we are willing to receive the love of Christ, we will not fully understand what it is that we are doing, not only with bread and wine, but also with water and towel.

Which brings us to the last part of the story, after the meal and after the washing of feet to show us how to serve others. After all of that, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment. It was not a suggestion, or a new item for their "to do" list, but a new commandment. "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 love for one another."

So on this night we remember that meal Jesus shared with his disciples, that precious meal that we are waiting to share again with one another. And in the meantime, we remember those other things Jesus taught us from the table – to serve one another and to love one another.

To know what Christ has done for us is to begin the work of loving others as Christ loves us. And it is also to receive the love of Christ from others in community. What Jesus has done and does for us always is not just about the cross. It is about the whole of the life of Christ, poured out for us. It is about the birth and the baptism, the teaching and the healing, the body and the blood, the water and the towel, the life and the death. And all of that is held in the feeding, serving, loving hand of God. Amen.