

Maundy Thursday; April 1, 2021

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Being part of the church is not easy work. It entails much effort and giving on our part, such as giving of the many wonderful things God has entrusted us each with – money, time, and talents – as we respond to the freely given saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. As followers of Christ, we are called into a life of service and giving. Jesus commands it of his disciples, “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” Each time the church gathers for worship, the Spirit sends us forth as Christ’s followers to be his hands and feet to the world bearing His presence to all we meet. Love as he loved. Give as he gave. Serve as he served.

The sense to give is intricately woven into human beings by God the Creator who gave us the very breath of life. We were given love and communion with our Creator. This self-giving nature of God is most fully revealed tomorrow as the Son of God marches to His death, giving himself, so that the world might be restored to a right relationship with His Father. On Easter morning we witness God giving new life through the glorious resurrection of the Son and we are given the promise of sharing in Christ’s resurrection. Jesus will give the Holy Spirit to be with us when he ascends into heaven to be with God, his loving parent. It is this Spirit who gives us faith to receive the gift of unconditional love and forgiveness.

We give. We give at home. We give at church. We give at work. We give in relationships. We give in so many ways; yet any mental health professional, spiritual advisor, or health care provider would also stress the importance of taking the time to receive. As people of faith, that may entail finding solitude, listening for God, spending time with the word of God, or coming before our God in worship with hands open to absorb the bounty of God’s grace and goodness. Miroslav Volf states in the book *Practicing Theology*, “The Christian faith is not primarily about human doing but about human receiving.” If that is indeed true, then I pause and wonder about these three days we are set to embark upon.

Especially tonight, because it is all too easy to jump to the naming of this day – “Maundy” Thursday. Maundy is from a Latin word that means “command.” Jesus’ command to love one another. We know this is what we are called to do, part and parcel to our baptismal vocation. It is our joyful and natural response that

flows from the abundance of the love he showers us with. The example he has shown us we are to follow. Yet, as a pastor, I wonder if I have jumped all too quickly in the past toward preaching on this command and perhaps glossed over too quickly that this night and for that matter, this week, is first and foremost about receiving. I wonder, as people of faith, in our busy, exhausting, sometimes out of control lives, do we stop to openly, honestly, humbly, come before our Lord, dusty, dirty, stinky feet and all and let our entire guard down and say, "Wash me, Lord?" Maybe, that is the gift of this day, this night, this example Jesus set that first Maundy Thursday evening with his disciples. It is first about receiving.

Because receiving precedes Jesus' command, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Jesus kneels before each disciple, grabs a towel, and washes their feet. At first Peter cannot comprehend receiving Jesus in this manner saying, "You will never wash my feet." The Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior, the King does not wash feet. But despite his protests, Jesus does wash the feet of the one who will soon betray him. There is nothing in the moment they can do; except, simply watch as Jesus kneels before them and lovingly washes their dusty, tired, and perhaps aching feet. Be still and receive the outstretched arms of Jesus. Dwell in the One who, "loved his own who were in the world" and "loved them to the end."

We heard the Apostle Paul, in Corinthians, open with, "For I received from the Lord what I also handed to you." He then goes on to speak the words of Jesus we will hear again as we receive the supper of our Lord. In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther writes, "That is shown us in these words: *Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins*; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." We come hands wide open to receive the love of God revealed in God's Son who gave himself for us.

In a year in which we have given so much for the safety and well-being of our neighbor, upholding the command Jesus gave the church to love one another, over the span of the next few days, I wonder if the Spirit may be inviting and calling us to simply come and receive. Let our cups be filled and then overflow with the goodness of God.