

## **Sermon: Jesus will love us to the end**

Ever faithful servants in Christ, in this Holy Week we proclaim the mystery of our faith as we behold the great love of Jesus, and contemplate his call for us to love one another.

“Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and go to the Father,” we read in tonight’s gospel reading “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

Tonight, and tomorrow, we find out what this means, for Jesus to love them to the end, for Jesus to love us to the end. Tonight, in the upper room. Tomorrow night, on the cross.

Think about what it would have been like to be in the upper room with Jesus on that first Maundy Thursday. Jesus has entered Jerusalem in triumph, but has also driven the moneychangers out of the temple, and angered the chief priests and religious leaders in that holy city.

They are now looking for a way to kill Jesus. He knows it, and his disciples know it.

They may have found a safe-haven in that upper room, but there is no safety outside those four walls. In fact, Jesus is now preparing his disciples for his death, and even telling them that one of his disciples, Judas, would betray him.

And now, just hours before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus has gathered his disciples together in this room. If we were there with him, we might wonder why. Why has he gathered us here? Is it to hide from danger? Is it to plan the next move? And what is the next move?

All of this is simply to point out that there was a lot going on that night, on that first Maundy Thursday. It was not the tranquil, holy scene that we often see pictured on those famous paintings of the Last Supper. And it makes what Jesus did that night even more remarkable.

During supper, knowing all that was to come, Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet. That simple act

was Jesus' response to all the chaos and confusion and conflict swirling around him; all the danger, all the suffering that he knew was coming.

The betrayal by Judas. The denial by Peter. The crowds shouting for him to be crucified. The religious and political leaders deriding him right up to his death. All of that was coming, and Jesus knew it.

And his response to all of that was the simplest, most humble, least practical, most ordinary act of love and kindness that you could possibly imagine. And he did it, he says, to teach his disciples, and to teach us, what is more important than anything else in the world.

He did it to teach us that at the end of the day, what really matters in this chaotic, crazy life is: love. To love each other as Jesus loved us is all that really matters.

When we look around the world today, there is a lot to be concerned about. There is a lot of unrest, a lot of tension, a lot of violence, homelessness, wars, and so much more. Turn on the news on any given day, and you will find something discouraging, something to worry about, or something to get angry about.

And all of that is why I think that what Jesus did in that upper room is so very important. And to remember that when he did this, it was at a very anxious and discouraged point in his ministry. The upper room was a very tense place. A fearful place. And a divided place. In other words, it was a real place.

And that is where Jesus did this very ordinary, yet extraordinary act. That is where Jesus got down on his hands and knees and washed their feet. That is where Jesus taught them to love one another. And where he issued his new commandment that we should do the same. Love one another.

When we see the trouble in our world, and are confronted with the latest disturbing news, what should we do? Love one another. When we have disagreements about what to do about all the challenges our world faces, what should we do? Love one another. When there are people who want to betray us, or deny knowing us, at our moment of deepest need, how should we respond? Love one another. When in doubt, Jesus seems to be teaching us, love one another. We can always do that.

No matter what else is going on in our lives, we can love one another. At times, it won't seem enough. We will want to do more. Life is complicated. This world is complicated. And there are many times when we will be tempted to find another answer. And that is when it will be important to remember again all the chaos, confusion, conflict, and unrest swirling around the upper room. And to remember how Jesus responded to all of that.

He responded to all of that, by loving those he was with. When in doubt, love another. A simple command, but one that can guide us through whatever confusion and chaos we might experience in this world.

There is a story told about the author of this gospel, John, that I just love, and that I share often. John, legend has it, is the only one of the twelve disciples who died of old age. In his later years, when John had become old and frail, he was the only person still living who had actually walked with Jesus in his earthly ministry; and so, his church community held him in very high esteem.

And the story goes that whenever he was in good enough health to come to worship, they would invite him to come to the front of the gathered congregation, and share a word with them. And he would walk to the front, and look at the people gathered and say to them, "Children, love one another ... love one another ... love one another." And he would return to his seat.

Every time, the same message: Love one another. That, for John, was what he learned from Jesus. John obviously learned more than that. He wrote a gospel and several letters that are included in our New Testament, but what was most important was this simple command from Jesus to love another.

Then, and now, this command to love one another can serve as our North Star, guiding us when we get lost or confused, and re-orienting us to the way in which we should live.

And now, today, this is no less important than it has ever been. If John were here today, I suspect he would say the same thing to us. And if Jesus were here, wouldn't he say the same? Love one another.

We have a lot going on this Holy Week, and in this Worship Service. We have had our sins forgiven and will participate in the institution of the Lord's Supper by receiving Holy Communion.

We have prepared the altar tonight. We will get ready to attend a service tomorrow; on the day our Lord was crucified. We will gather Sunday morning to celebrate the greatest miracle of them all.

There is a lot in this service, and throughout this Holy Week. And it would be easy to get distracted from what is at the heart of it all. And what is at the heart of it all is love. God's love for us, which Jesus embodies. And our Lord's command to us to share that love with one another.

"Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end."

What does that mean? That he loved us to the end? Many things, but tonight, if you want a picture of that love, an example of what it might look like, then picture the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, down on his hands and knees, washing feet. And remember his words: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Lord, help us to love others as you first loved us. Amen