

Reflection: The One Who Serves

It is an act of intimate friendship—in the hands of Jesus. Once again that which was common in the eyes of the world is made holy in the hands of Jesus. The washing of a person's feet, as they entered into a home, was a job performed by the slave of the master of the house. Jesus, once again, offers a different view of the world by giving us one more glimpse of the Kingdom of God where the titles of slave and master are forever getting themselves mixed up and where the greatest is not the one who is served but the one who is serving.

This night is about the welcome. Even as the welcome cannot be received by each of us in person. I have wondered about the world in which we are now living. Are people growing closer together or farther apart as we journey more deeply into this pandemic quagmire. I have read comment after comment on Facebook about how people are learning to live together in new ways as families, as roommates, as neighbors. I have heard conversations on video conferencing where people have shared stories of reconnecting with old friends or family members on the other side of the state or across the nation. For the most part all of those connections – welcome moments in this new life we live. And I could easily spend these few moments with you celebrating the power of that welcome in our lives. The ability to reconnect. The opportunity to reach out. The joy of hearing the voice of a friend long silent in our lives. And we could honor that welcome – we could celebrate the newfound intimacy of relationships restored, renewed, remembered. And maybe that is the easy way out on this Maundy Thursday. On this night of the commandment – I wonder if Jesus telling us to “love one another” is enough food for your journey as we travel late in the evening to worship in the garden of Gethsemane. Will the words of Jesus be enough to sustain us as we watch our Savior arrested and the long day ahead come Friday – when trusted friends and obedient disciples will disappear and the sounds of casting lots and a leather whip tearing into flesh and the pounding of a hammer against nail and the cries from a cross will be more sound and sights than we think we will be able to witness. Will mere words be enough? And this year, do we have any choice?

Our forced separation from gathering together as community has been a struggle. It is the touch, the smile, the tear, the hug, the voice lifted in song and in prayer that brings peace to broken hearts. How often, in the stories of our Savior, do we hear of Jesus reaching out to touch the outcast, the leper, the prostitute, the possessed, the deaf, the mute, the blind, the dying? It is the example Jesus teaches us. And for too long – we have taken his example for granted. Yes, Jesus we see you. Soon enough Jesus, we will get to the needs of our neighbors. In a minute – when we have more time. Yes, Lord – I will feed the hungry. Of course, Jesus, I will get a drink for this thirsty soul. Okay Jesus, I will visit the woman who is sick – the man who sits behind the bars. Except, for now, we are told none of that is possible. For these days, this virus claims our freedom and although worship comes in many forms, I am both the one who hungers and thirsts to gather with the community of believers.

As of this Maundy Thursday night, it will have been an entire month since the last time our community has gathered together for worship. And perhaps it is from this difficult anniversary that my grief at the loss of this worshipping community has finally run over my cup. This night is about welcome. This night is about watching our savior wash the feet of his friends. This night is about hearing a word of forgiveness and feeling that forgiveness laid upon our foreheads in the same way the mark of the cross was offered to our foreheads at our baptism. This night is about gathering at table to taste the promise of our God – the promise of forgiveness, the promise of mercy, the promise of joy, the promise of eternal life, the promise of welcome to each of us again and again. And yet – this night – I can offer none of it to you. I cannot wash your feet. I cannot wrap you in a hug to share the peace. I cannot lay hands on your head to offer you words of forgiveness. I cannot serve you bread and wine. Does that mean that the

promise of God does not exist? Of course not. The promises of God are not given with a magical touch. The promises of God are spoken through the living Word of our Savior Jesus.

- "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations." (Genesis 17:4)
- "The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in obedience to him." (Deuteronomy 28:9)
- "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)
- "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)
- "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)
- "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)
- "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)
- "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)
- "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7)
- "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

We are citizens of an eternal kingdom. And our lives are measured by the standards of that kingdom. These standards call for love, honesty, mercy—whether they produce immediate riches and happiness or pain and sorrow. The goal is no longer security or survival. The goal is service. "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who is served? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves! "The one who serves is greatest," said Jesus.

What wondrous love is this that Jesus takes his place at the table as host and master and yet stoops down to serve all of us who gather at his feet. The longer we are apart – the more difficult the separation becomes. For now, we are invited to feed on God's Word until the day we are able to gather again as one body of Christ to taste the promise of God's love in bread and wine. On that day my friends, when we gather, what a feast there will be. Until that day, we are reminded of the love of our Savior that will carry him all the way to the cross. What wondrous love is this that Jesus would offer us a way of remembering where common things are made holy and where the invited guests, you and me, are all honored guests at the meal. Reminding us once again that the greatest is not the one who is served but the one who is serving. Amen.