



## Sermon from Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter April 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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### Maundy Thursday

*Luke 22:7-18, Exodus 12:1-14a, Psalm 116:1,10-17, John 13:1-15, Luke 22:19-27, Psalm 22*

If you knew that an upcoming night would be your last meal with your most beloved friends, family, and comrades in life, what would you do to mark that time with them?

If you knew that this time with these particular people in this moment were your last time with them, how would you want to be remembered – and how would you want to remember – and what would be enduring from your time together with them?

I remember when Heather and I were in Morocco for part of our honeymoon, so many years ago. There were and still are enclosed public baths for men and for women. Here and in other places in the Middle East, these baths were where people went to get clean and refreshed from the region's dry heat. It was also the great leveling place, these baths that harken back to the time of the Roman Empire, where people from across social classes would come – and where things could be discussed in a different way, often more down to earth.

What struck me was the intimacy of how they bathed. Men washed each other or were washed by bath workers, following a clear ritual process. Likewise for women in their public baths. Because it is a whole region with limited fresh water, folks made the most careful and thorough use of water that they could. So, a bath was more like a generous sponge-bath in a steam-room. First, part of a bucket of water to get you wet in the steam. Then, a gentle, slow and steady scrape-down of the skin using a flat, blunt steel strip or a special glove, and a final rinse-off. Some time afterwards sipping mint tea would complete the time.

Heather and I were only in Morocco for about a week, so we were not there long enough to move that much into the culture. We stuck with our classic American/European private bathroom. But, had we gone back for any extended time, especially for work in ministry, we would certainly have found our way across our own internal barriers to move into the culture.

I share this to paint a picture of a different kind of connection between people than what we tend to have as more privately oriented people often from northern European ancestry and certainly inheriting American individualist privacy. But it is not far back in our own culture – for some places not much more than 50 or 60 years – when neighbors and friends would come to assist with a birth at home, and when neighbors and friends would assist bereaved family members in washing and cleansing the body of a loved one who had just died – and when men who had been working long hours might enter a public bath together to get clean.

Bodies. It's what we're made of. These arms and hands, these toes and ankles and legs, these torsos and bellies of all shapes and sizes, these necks and ears and noses and locks of hair (or lacks of hair). These parts of us that bear the marks of our growth, our strengths, our delights, our fading strengths, our accidents and injuries and wounds, our ways of making due with what we've got.

And God loves them. When we say God loves us, we mean all of us – bodies from head to toe.

So, Jesus washes feet. Just as he and his disciples no doubt washed their own feet together along the road at some points. Just as people washed their feet or provided basins and servants to assist in washing feet when they entered a home – and to fail to do so was considered impolite on the part of a host. Sure, maybe the host in a larger household with servants would leave such work to the servants, because it was considered not so honorable to wash feet – even though it was an expected show of open hospitality.

But Jesus jumps across these internal barriers that are attached to notions of keeping one's honor and holding one's position in society. He steps up, takes off his outer garments and dresses down to the level of a house servant, takes up a towel and a bowl and jug of water, and one by one goes around the room washing the feet of each disciple there.

He knows these feet. These feet that have shared the road with his own. These feet that have been with his own in boats and fields and desert places and town squares and synagogues and the Temple and people's homes.

And Jesus loves them. Because he loves each person whose feet they are.

Becoming a servant like this for others, willingly, is not so Jesus can feel better about himself. He does this willingly because of his deep love for each person in the room.

Imagine. What is Jesus inviting us – no, commanding us – to do in this new commandment? His new commandment, the new *mandatum*, the new mandate for followers of Jesus, is to love – and to let all our actions flow from and through that love which comes from God and flows through the Son of God, God-with-us. And when we love, when we let ourselves be taken and guided by such love that comes from God, we cannot help but see each person as the Beloved, and we cannot help but act with adoring care. We take up the towel willingly.

Bodies. It is such intimacy that Jesus continues in sharing a meal and moving the meal to an even more intimate level of love. Bread and wine, shared – these become part of the closeness shared between them all with Jesus, and he speaks what is true – he is giving himself to them through this bread, this wine.

How do you want to be remembered?

Jesus says, "Whenever you eat this bread, whenever you drink this cup, do this in remembrance of me." Do this recalling who I am and who I have been with you and continue to be with you.

Feed one another. Share meals with one another. Wash each other's feet. Give yourself away. And keep doing this with people on and on and on, through all places of the world, wherever you are and wherever the Spirit leads you. This is how you will love. Just as I have loved you.

How do you want to be remembered?

Dear friends, tonight is about love, flowing freely and with such deep care.

May our days be like this with one another and with the world around us. May we hold as treasures each day with others, wherever we are, asking "how do I want to be remembered? how will this moment matter when I am gone?" And stand ready with towel in hand and with basket of bread and wine by our side, to give and share with loving care. Giving our bodies, hearts, souls, minds for other bodies all around us. Because, friends, this is holy ground. Take off your shoes – it's holy ground you are walking on.

Amen.

## Good Friday

*Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, Psalm 69:1-23, Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9, John 18:1-19:42*

It is a grim day.

I just do not know what to say, most Good Fridays. It all leaves me speechless. This awful, terribly sad, horrifying, cruel journey. We join in the garden to meet the betrayer and the hired soldiers. We follow to the high priest's hall and its courtyard. We enter Pilate's chamber. We come before the crowd. We watch the cross carried through the city. We behold nails driven and cross raised high. We enter the tomb with a body wrapped. We step out and watch it all sealed up.

It is a grim day.

For the past forty years, I think of my mother on this day – the day she died after her long battle with ovarian cancer. I cannot help it. This day is not about her. And yet, for me and for my siblings, it has intertwined itself with the meaning and journey of this day.

So many of you have seen deaths this year. Family members, work colleagues, neighbors, friends old and new. Some of you have seen deaths from this year that dealt death in high numbers across this nation and world. We have experienced deaths in other ways over this year that has stopped us, slowed us, locked us in place. So many have lost work, have lost income and places to live in safety. We have all lost a sense of security and invincibility.

All of that intertwines itself with our experience of this day, when we follow Jesus to the cross and the tomb. The sorrows of the world are all around him among the crowd, the followers daring to come somewhat close, the taunters pushing their own anger at losses in their lives onto him like a scapegoat being driven from the camp, the soldiers and police of the day just carrying out their duty, the people coming to see what is continuing to happen to their people day after day and victim after victim. All the sorrows and griefs and losses, all the sinful decisions and regrets and responsibilities that weigh them down. They are here, intertwining with the One they behold as he receives and carries the human cruelty driving him forward to his death.

How can this Friday be good?

All our sorrows. All our griefs. All our wrongs. We know they are not the same as Jesus' sufferings. But cannot help it – they rise within us to the surface and flow out along the path with him. In his journey we see the cruelties and injustices of this world, suffered by so many.

This week as we are into hearing the trial of the police officer under whose unmoving knee George Floyd died... This week as we continue to see a series of mass shootings that take innocent lives... This week as we see once again the horrific way people at our border are dealt with and processed, not even as carefully as our cattle...

Here we stand at Golgotha, at the end of this year when the death toll across our nation climbed by 16% in a time when people refused to heed or stick to warnings of an oncoming storm of a pandemic that was sweeping the world... In a world where governments seize power from people in order to keep them under control, where military rulers refuse the will of a free election and impose absolute rule, killing those who

protest... In a world where whole peoples have been obliterated out of hatred, in every continent – where no nation is free of guilt or blood.

We follow Jesus along the path of his suffering and death. We watch as Jesus is pressed along the same paths of human cruelty tread by thousands, by millions, through the ages.

It all intertwines. See some paintings by artists who glimpsed part of this interweaving across all times, spaces, and cultures with the death of Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Marc Chagall's "White Crucifixion" ([HERE](#)) shows Jesus the Jew on a cross, his waist wrapped in a prayer shawl, in the center of this montage painting that also shows scenes of Jew's houses being burned, being shot in prisons, fleeing with meager possession and the Torah scrolls and children in arms, some of their spirits calling out and covering their eyes. Jesus' suffering is part of the story of the suffering of Jews through the ages.

De Motta e Silva's painting of Jesus being flogged ([HERE, near bottom](#)) shows Jesus as a black man tied to an obelisk with the seal of the government at the top, in the central square of the city – surrounded by churches that overshadow people's homes in silent assent to the violence being done, and with faceless passers-by who are citizens that have grown accustomed to what is being done.

He Chi's vivid painting in Chinese folk style ([HERE](#)) shows Pilate washing his hands, looking directly into the eyes of Jesus before him in stocks. On Pilate's chest is a ghostly traditional mask from Chinese opera, as a way of showing how the culture participates in crucifying Christ.

At the end of our bulletin from Maundy Thursday is a picture of the etching by Peggy Parker, given to our church by Rev. Holladay Sanderson. It shows Jesus bound before Pilate. Looking out at us as the viewers, then, we become Pilate, or the crowd. Jesus' face reminds me of the rough faces I have seen drawn on top of menacing bodies, that are sold as targets for shooting practice – the faces are even more distorted to look thug-like but also intentionally to evoke stereotypical ideas of the dangerous Hispanic or Black man. Here, in Peggy's etching it is clear that Jesus is not a stereotypically gentle and benign white Jesus.

Today confronts us. Today carries us on a path we don't want to see. Yet, here it is.

But today is a good day. At least, that is what we dare in faith and trust to say.

Because today, Jesus, the Son of Man, Emmanuel who is God-with-us, walks this gauntlet of all our sin, all our wounds, all our fragility and fallibility and fault, all our cruelty and dismissive disregard – and lets it all intertwine – in his own self, his own person. He does this for love. He does this in trust – even in the midst of the terror – that death will not have the final answer, and that the Way of Love walks through the valleys of the shadows of death and through the sufferings and cruelties of the ages and this moment – that the path of healing and new life for all is in turning the story by journeying purposefully through it.

This is where the story become the story of God-with-us, and no longer our story. We are not capable of what Jesus has done – once for all, across all times and places and peoples. There may be some moments for us of giving ourselves, even to the point of dying in various ways, for the love and care of others. But not like this, and not in the way that it touches and intertwines and interweaves with the fabric of all humanity and all creation. This is where God reigns, where God shows God's truest and fullest self – loving us all, in spite of everything, even to the point of death. It is here that Jesus says, "It is accomplished."

This is a good day. Mysteriously so, hard for us to see and grasp, yet we catch a sense of it in the love that Jesus shows and gives to the very end. As the hymn by William Vanstone says,

“Here is God, no monarch he, throned in easy state to reign;  
here is God, whose arms of love aching, spent, the world sustain.”

Here, even here, the story turns. And we wait now, even at the sorrow and grief of the grave, for the story to continue to turn.

# Easter Day

*Isaiah 25:6-9*

*John 20:1-18*

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Happy Easter Day, everyone one!

This is a day for all peoples!

This is a day of feasting!

Cast off the shroud that has been over our hearts --

Christ our God who died has risen, is alive.

Death is conquered.

Souls in captivity to death and hell find release, and Christ leads them to life.

But it is still dark.

It is still dark when we first get a glimpse of this good, amazing new thing.

It is still dark when Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb.

It is still dark. Today, about this world, we can say, it is still dark. This year, after thirteen months of anxious life in the challenge of this worldwide pandemic that has claimed over 550,000 in our nation, after the tidal wave of social and economic cost to people's lives and the burden on everyone's mental health, it is still dark. In a world of ongoing racism, of hotly and angrily divisive partisan ideologies, of people neglected and abused, it is still dark. There is sorrow and gloom and things that just don't seem to change.

And yet, even in the dark, it just takes one person to see God's life-changing work. Just one person in a community. And that person doesn't even need to fully understand or get it all at once. That person only needs to speak as much as she has seen so far. Even in the darkness of different times of distress, confusion, and uncertainty in our worlds. It only takes one to glimpse that things are changing, and then to invite others to see with him, for light to begin to grow and a door to open for all of us together to wonder, and to step out seeking to see and understand more for ourselves.

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She loved Jesus dearly and was a deeply devoted follower. She was there to come close to her beloved, her hope, her wise teacher who opened life to her in so many new ways.

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene found things had been disrupted. It was in the gloom that change had happened.

But it was still dark. The dawn had not yet begun, but the light was beginning to grow. She did not know what to make of what she had seen. Something had changed – and not in a small way. The stone was rolled away.

As she runs to tell her fellow followers of Jesus what she had found, she began try to interpret what it meant. She began to jump to conclusions, to make sense of it all.

How do we make sense of the surprise, the thing that happens that we never expected? How do we make sense of the stirring of something that unsettles our gloom, that shifts the darkness?

As the sky lightens on her way back to her friends, an idea grows in her, that someone had broken in and stolen Jesus' body. She had no idea who – but that was the only explanation that made sense to her. Someone. A nameless “they” – maybe she thinks it was the religious leaders who had condemned Jesus to death and stirred up the crowds against him, as a final cruel act against Jesus and his followers – maybe she thinks it was the governor's soldiers, as a way of preventing any kind of ongoing adoration or remembering of Jesus – but really, she just doesn't know what to think, so she blurts out to the other disciples, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've laid him!”

Something new in our darkness can bring distress. As the light begins to spread, it can bring with it new thoughts and feelings, fresh tears. Mary is no doubt crying as she brings her news – and her interpretation of what she has seen – to the people she loves

Two of the other disciples jump up and run, alarmed at the news. They get to the tomb in the dawning light and look in, and even step inside. They see more than Mary saw in the dark – the bands of linen laid out flat, and the cloth head-covering rolled up fresh away from the other cloth. One of them sees this, with Peter his friend by his side, and believes. John's gospel records that “he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand...” This one comes, sees, and believes even before he understands. He opens the door to faith and hope once again.

The light is rising on the first day of recognizing and embracing something new.

But Mary isn't there yet. She has run to follow the other two disciples, back to the tomb. She is with them as they take in what they have seen. I suspect that Peter and the other one don't yet have many words to say, because they are stunned like Mary has been. But something shifts in them, and a new bond of shared reality grows between them, and they return to where they were staying – to think on these things, to talk with others. And so the light continues to grow and dawn slowly in them.

Mary is still distraught as they leave, and remains at the tomb, still weeping, not knowing how to make sense of it all, looking inside now for what next can help her see and understand.

She sees two angels. Now, let's stop right there. She sees two angels! Sitting there, where Jesus' body had been laid. They are ready to bring good news to her, themselves dressed in light. And they reach out with the tender question to them, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary is caught still in the darker solution to the puzzle that she had concluded earlier. So, she repeats what she said to the other disciples, this time even more personally – “They have taken my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” So, she hardly even seems to see the angels that have spoken to her. It's almost like she is talking to herself, and she turns away before they can answer her.

The light is growing all around, but Mary is still caught up in dark and fearful wanderings, the conviction of her own conclusions. When she turns away from the angels, she sees Jesus. Jesus has stepped into her sight. But in her distress she is still not seeing fully.

This is how it goes for so many of us. In our darkness, in our distress, in the rumbling scripts of our foregone conclusions, we may not see the light growing all around us and the clear presence of new life right in front of us. Conversion doesn't come easily. It takes time. And it takes us being unsettled.

Jesus repeats the question of the angels. Jesus notes Mary's sorrow and distress, shows concern, and opens a door for her.



That is what we can do for others around us, in any place. Knock at the door. Crack it open. Call inside, with care.

So, Jesus speaks directly to Mary, but she does not even recognize his voice. She answers again with the same conclusion she has made, this time asking Jesus if he, himself, had taken the body somewhere.

What saves Mary Magdalene in the end is Jesus calling her name. "Mary."

Simple. Direct. So very personal. "Mary." Jesus says her name, and in saying it is also saying to her, "I know you. I know you so well."

"Mary." And the light really, fully dawns for her. Mary hears Jesus, and now sees him. She is no longer wandering in uncertainty in the gloom. She sees – she really sees – and she knows, and she responds with her whole heart and voice, "Teacher!" And then, she is ready to hear Jesus speak and ready to take in what he has for her to do. "Go and tell the others."

There is a new confidence, a new steadiness in Mary when she arrives to meet the other followers of Jesus. The tears are gone, wiped from her eyes by the warmth of Jesus reaching out to her and calling her to herself. No uncertainty, no second-guessing now. She says directly, "I have seen the Lord." At rest in the new truth of new risen life, she tells the others all she had experienced. She is home. She is home in the light of the risen Son.

You have heard me say it before, friends. Jesus saves us by meeting us and calling us by name. Each one of us.

Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Word of God, the risen Lord of Life, knows you and calls you by name.

Jesus knows you. You. Has always known you, and will always know you.

Jesus calls to you – knows your name, your identity, your heart and soul, your body in all its parts.

David. Glenda. Kristin. Bill. Jo. Henry. Natalie. Paul. Judy. Mildred. Bert.

All across the world, he calls each by name. No matter what each has suffered, even no matter what each has inflicted.

George. Derek. Delaina. Xiaojie. Robert. Liang. Nashom.

We do not realize it, but in so many moments in our lives we come upon the empty tomb. We meet and see angels announcing good news. We meet Jesus, we hear the Lord of Life calling our name. On the road. In the closed room. In the morning, evening, night. On the lakeshore. In the city square.

In our baptisms in the Episcopal Church, we receive God's embracing love for each of us, by name – and we each take on promises to stay in the fellowship of light, to speak and live with Mary's message "I have seen the Lord," and to search for and recognize and serve Jesus in every person we encounter. These promises contain an important resurrection presumption – that we will indeed meet Jesus in others in our lives, and that we will bring Jesus and be Jesus for others all around us.

Jesus lives! Death is conquered. Christ Jesus rises victorious. And this same Jesus calls you by your name. Now ascended, he is everywhere and is found and shown everywhere.

No matter what your gloom, your darkness, the dawn is breaking. The Son is risen. And Jesus is calling you, even through your confusions and convictions that have blinded you. Open your eyes, your ears, your hearts. New life is here, and is calling you.