

## Maundy Thursday

“You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

So says Jesus to Peter as once again, Peter, oh so human Peter, the rock upon which Christ's church is built, displays his feet, which are not only dirty, they are, like mine, made of clay.

The way of life that Jesus invites us into is at once so simple, yet so frighteningly difficult that we can only be grateful that his original followers, his closest friends, also struggle, as we do, with this way of being.

He is so different from us.

For the most part, we, like the disciples, are hoarders.

We hoard not only material things like food and money, gadgets and knickknacks, but we also hoard love and friendship, affection and intimacy, sharing these precious things with the select few, the truly deserving.

Jesus, on the other hand, is a waster, and he invites us to become wasters too, a challenge that, at least for me, often leaves me feeling paralyzed with inaction, afraid of the leap he invites me to take, because the net is nowhere to be seen.

Jesus wastes seeds by tossing them everywhere, no matter the condition of the soil.

He wastes healing on undeserving Roman servants, on pagan children, on the outcast and the unclean, on hookers and taxpayers.

And tonight, he wastes love, taking on the job only a servant must do in those days, as he invites his disciples to become naked, not by stripping off their clothing, but by stripping off their pride, and allowing him to wash their feet.

“You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

Isn't that so very true for us?

We show up here week in and week out.

We think about the gospels and the lessons we have learned, and we occasionally try with all that we are to practice what we preach, to practice what is preached, and slowly perhaps, understanding comes to our door and embraces us.

But then, just as quickly, it is gone.

Tonight we remember yet again just how strange God's ways are, and how terrifying it is to be grasped by the living God, this God who loves us enough to sift us through until only the grain remains, who turns his holy fire upon us, until all the dross is gone, leaving only the gold.

Perhaps this is why St John, out of all the gospels, shows us the Holy Eucharist not through the breaking of bread and drinking of wine, but through the washing of feet.

By the time John writes his gospel, the newly formed Christian communities have many years of living with their own clay feet.

And what he sees is that people, everywhere and always, have a knack for turning what is intended to be a meal open to all, a table to which everyone is invited, well, we are very good at drawing lines, and creating rules that exclude, and as time goes by, turning what was intended to be a way for us to see God at work in the simplest parts of life, into high holy ritual, surrounded by magic, presided over by the select few...

Which is perhaps why St. John gives us the lesson we have today.

Because feet are feet.

They grow bunions and attract warts, toenails get ingrown and sometimes infected.

It's hard to ritualize dirty feet.

It's hard to set up a hierarchy of smelly toes.

And while the sacrament of the bread and wine has evolved so that priests dressed to the nines stand before the holy altar while everyone else kneels, on this night, St. John sees to it that those same priests remove their colorful clothes, and before heading to the sacred altar, kneel before each and every one of you, taking bunions and warts and dirt and grime, and washing them with tender loving care.

And in that way, reminding all of us that the way of God in this world is through quiet and humble service; that the strength of God is found in what we humans call weakness; that despite all appearances to the contrary, it's not anti-immigrant rhetoric or huge Pentagon budgets that win the day, it is mercy, it is kindness, it is love.

And with that, we may finally come to know what Jesus is doing, and then, perhaps we may, at long last, understand.

+amen