

March 28, 2024
Maundy Thursday
Grace Church, Muncie
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalms 116:1, 10-17

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the Name of God: Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tonight, we step into a different way of telling and experiencing time. From now until we celebrate the Resurrection, we step into a time that is unlike the time of our day-to-day life. We will come here to Grace and go home and come back many times until Sunday, yet every liturgical act is a part of a greater whole.

Each service reflects a facet of the Paschal Mystery – the mystery that holds together the death and resurrection of Jesus, both crucifixion and new life. It is through the Paschal Mystery – this peculiar and intense combination of contradictions that seem like they can't go together – that God has established a new covenant of reconciliation.

Tonight, Holy Scripture overflows with stories of God's lavish, radical, hospitality to us. In Exodus, God reboots time for the Israelites as they are freed from bondage. *This month shall mark for you the beginning of months.* And a festive meal is established as a memorial.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul hands on to us the earliest known account of the Eucharist: God's extravagant, radical hospitality in the simplest of meals, a piece of bread and a sip of wine.

In John's account of the Upper Room, Jesus also pushes the reset button: *I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another, just as I have loved you.*

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Here's a question, how can you command one person to love another? It feels like my mother saying, "be nice to your sisters." How does that work?

Well, let's spend a moment thinking about the tradition of hospitality in which Jesus lived. Once again, my friend and colleague from Sewanee, the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Wright, gives us some insight. Although Biblical Hebrew has no vocabulary for hospitality or any of its components, we know from reading the stories that it was essential in Israelite society.

At its root, the point of hospitality is protection for one who is away from home. Host and guest have mutual responsibilities. An honorable host was to protect the guests at all costs. An honorable guest was to spread the word about a good host. (Think of giving a good review on Yelp.) And what do you suppose sealed this important relationship between host and guest? Foot-washing.

In the upper room that night, Jesus is pledging to the disciples to be their host, to protect them even if it costs him his life -- as it will the very next day. Because they are recipients of Jesus' hospitality, the disciples are supposed to tell others about him -- to spread the Good News.

This sounds wonderful -- for them, way back then in the Upper Room. What about us? How many of us squirm at being on the receiving end of the type of unselfish love for others that we call *agape*? You might not be surprised that I have a story.

During my years in Connecticut, I went through a period of being under- or unemployed. The financial pressures were massive, but my siblings and some friends always seemed to be there when needed. Eventually, things began to look up, and I learned to lean on them less.

Then came time for a family gathering on the west coast, and I was invited to be there. I said, *I'd love to, and I have the time, but I can't afford it.* "What if it weren't a matter of affording it?" *You all have been so good to me, I can't ask.* "What if it's not a matter of you asking, would you come?"

You see how circular our family conversations are? We hail from Wisconsin, after all. After several go-arounds, I said I would think about it. I then reported that long conversation to a friend of mine and asked his advice. He said, "Paul, why don't you stop being an ass and just say thank you."

And, plunk, we're back in the Upper Room, with Jesus preparing to wash Peter's feet. My functional New Testament, the one that I carry between my ears, has Jesus saying, *Peter, why don't you stop being an ass and just say thank you.*

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When Jesus takes the feet of Peter, or any of the disciples, he embraces the dirt and filth from the road, along with all the blisters and calluses and muck in their hearts. No wonder Peter protests. But Jesus insists, *Peter, why don't you stop being an ass and just say thank you.* And he does.

Then, of course, Jesus tells them to wash each other's feet -- to look out for each other, to protect each other, and continue to spread the Gospel.

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Let's bring this closer to home. How do you move from squirming to gratitude to sharing the Good News of God in Christ? How do you live into a life of being both an honorable host and an honorable guest? I think to be faithful to Jesus' new commandment to love others, you must first see, at a deep level, how much, how lavishly, how radically, Jesus already loves you. And then, just say thank you...by passing that love on to others.

We began the week remembering Samuel Crossman's words, "O, who am I, that for my sake, my Lord should take frail flesh and die?" Who are you? You are God's beloved child; let your God love you.

As you ponder this facet of the Paschal Mystery tonight, here is a poem by Edwina Gateley (*Let Your God Love You*).

Be silent.	
Be still.	
Alone.	
Empty	
Before your God.	
Say nothing.	
Ask nothing.	
Be silent.	
Be still.	
Let your God look upon	
you.	
That is all.	
God knows.	
God understands.	
	God loves you
	With an enormous love,
	And only wants
	To look upon you
	With that love.
	Quiet.
	Still.
	Be.
	Let your God—
	Love you.

Amen.