



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. CANON CRISTI CHAPMAN, CANON FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND STEWARDSHIP
MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2020
EXODUS 12:1-14; PSALM 116:1, 10-17; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; JOHN 13:1-17, 31b-35

JESUS, REMEMBER

My husband got a haircut today. The first time, he kept asking me if I knew what I was doing. With as much courage as I could muster and with my hands shaking, I told him to trust me. In retrospect, my response was meant to reassure me as much as it was to assure him. And I suppose it worked, because for the last 30 years, I have faithfully cut his hair every few weeks. While he may trust me now, I still have to reassure myself, either silently or aloud, that all will be well.

When Jesus bent down to wash Peter's feet, Jesus had to reassure Peter, too. Trust me! Jesus said, I know this doesn't make sense right now, but eventually, it will. Peter received that cryptic pastoral counsel about as well as we do. What do you mean, Jesus? Why now, and why me? How do you know it will be okay? No wonder Peter was confused. It is hard to imagine

God stooping down from heaven to wash dirty feet. It's harder still to understand how God would willingly suffer and die like all of us. Peter was exacerbated. So are we. Jesus, we don't know what is happening right now, but please, help us understand.

Today marks the start of the Triduum. For the next three days, we will remember Jesus's final hours with his disciples. We will participate in his betrayal and witness his crucifixion and death. And, at the end, we will discover that death never gets the last word. The Triduum marks the culmination of every Holy Week pilgrimage. But this year, that holy work and our sacred journey through it is complicated.

Tonight, the nave is all but empty. Honestly, it feels more like an empty tomb waiting to receive the tortured

body of the one we call Lord and Savior.

The tender acts Jesus asks us to do tonight will happen in living rooms and kitchens throughout the city. For some, that will come as a relief. For others, this will be a challenge. This may be the first time you wash the feet of another person. It may be the first time you wash your own hands and feet by yourself with holy intention. Without the safety and anonymity of the nave, what you do may feel awkward. You may feel exposed and vulnerable, and that's okay.

Then there are all those emotions. Tonight, our hearts are heavy. The anticipation of what is to come has been replaced by confusion of what is. We worry not only for Jesus. We also grieve over an uncertain future for ourselves and for the whole world. Maybe that's what was on Jesus's mind on the eve of his death. Maybe that's why this Triduum, right now, is so important.

Tonight, we practice the ancient rituals of our ancestors. The congregation of Israel sheltered in place as a destructive plague ravaged their world. They also offered prayers to God and shared a meal with each other while they waited. Tonight, so do we.

The disciples crammed together with Jesus in a living room. They prepared to recall that same Passover story, and they ate a simple meal. Then Jesus threw in a twist. He washed the disciples' feet and commanded them to do the same. On that night, Jesus shattered the boundaries that tried to contain Love. Tonight, Jesus shatters those same fetters that bind our hearts and minds.

Tonight, we recall those same stories and practice the same rituals, because that's what Jesus asks us to. But this is no ordinary ask by Jesus. We remember, but not in the way people recall facts or retell stories around a campfire.

What happens tonight gets at something deeper, something that is universal and timeless. God's people have been in tough spots before and will be again. Hardship and suffering are a part of human existence. While God is not the cause of those, neither is God absent or exempted from them either. The cross is evidence of that.

The sacred stories we hear tonight remind us of those realities. They give meaning to the hard experiences of human existence. They also provide a way to move forward. Put simply, what happens tonight gives us a framework

to help put back the pieces of our shattered, broken lives. By remembering, we and God find a way forward together.

What happens tonight is also deeply incarnational. What happens in your homes and in this space is not something limited to this special liturgy on this holy day. That's not what Jesus had in mind when he washed the feet of his friends and commanded them to do the same. The example set before us was meant to be embraced and embodied by all people for the rest of time. That's how the Body of Christ is continually remembered. That's also how that same Body shows up in the world, healing what is broken and hurting.

What happens tonight also says something about the future, but not just yours or mine. Love embodied is love anticipated.¹ But this love is not an exclusive right limited to a certain group, nor is it meant to benefit one group of people over another. God has

never been interested in that kind of love. Neither should we. That's one reason why we shelter in place: to protect ourselves and those we will never know. That's why we wash our hands and wear face masks in public: to care for neighbors and strangers alike.

Jesus commands us to love another as Jesus loves us. In a couple of minutes, you will be invited to put that commandment into practice in your own homes. You will wash the feet of those you are with. If you are by yourself, you will wash your hands and feet with intention for yourself. Then, you will eat a meal, offer prayers, and read sacred scripture. Whether you are with others or by yourself, know that Jesus is right there with you, accompanying you in these sacred acts. So is God. God is both guest and host at every table and in every space. God is right there, too, giving thanks for you and for your love. Go, and embody that same love in all that you do.

¹Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 100.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35 [Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 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 and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."]



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!