

Title: A Way for These In-Between Times

Date: 4/14/2022 (Maundy Thursday)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 7pm Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)

Readings: [Exodus 12:1-4, \(5-10\), 11-14](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#); [John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#); [Psalm 116:1, 10-17](#)

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/Ju2N2ZhWrno?t=1070>

In the words of the psalmist:

How shall I repay the Lord for all the good things he has done for me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. (Ps 116:10-12)

My siblings in Christ, we are almost there. We are almost at the end of Lent. Almost, but not quite. There are still three more days.

The fancy name for these three days of preparation leading up to Easter is the Triduum. It starts with Maundy Thursday, then Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Some people count the Easter Vigil as the third service instead, likely because candles and choirs are more appealing than the darkness of hell. (I get it) I count Holy Saturday because it's important to remember Jesus didn't rush toward resurrection, either. Instead, Jesus went down to hell, completing his experience of the depths of fear and horror and grief and uncertainty that we experience.

Though it's tempting to fast forward to Easter, to pastels and bunnies and dresses, to resurrection, these three days of preparation help us slow down and remind us to be present.

You have probably heard some variation of the cliché, "It's about the journey, not the destination." Even though my nature is to push back and argue about the nuances of this broad generalization, I recognize this saying is popular because there is truth in it.

For the vast majority of our life, we are on a journey. Even when we get there, wherever "there" is, that destination becomes the starting point of the next journey. In 2020, the pandemic began as Lent began, and now, two years later, it feels like the pandemic is ending (knock on wood) as Lent is ending. But we're not quite there yet. St. Alban's is at the end of its interim period, but when it comes to where we're going, Magic Eight Ball says... "Cannot predict now."¹

Some people are waiting for a medical diagnosis. Some are waiting for an answer to a question they don't know how to ask. Some are waiting for the moral arc of the universe to continue bending toward justice without bouncing back and hitting them in the face. In times like these, we feel like we're in limbo, almost there but not quite yet.

On Maundy Thursday, we are reminded that when the people of God cannot go back to where they were and have no idea what is going to happen next, God doesn't just tell us to have faith. God doesn't tell us how to feel. God points us toward visible signs of God's invisible grace. Through Jesus, God gives us a way.

Maundy Thursday takes its name from the word “maundy.” It comes from the Latin word “mandatum,”² which means “command.” This is the root of the word “mandate.” Just as God gave very detailed instructions to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt on the eve of the events commemorated at Passover, tonight we remember the command that Jesus gave us on the eve of his crucifixion.

At the end of today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus tell his disciples, “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” (Jn 13:34-35).

I consider this the third great commandment. The Two Great Commandments, which come from the Old Testament, are to love God with all our heart and soul and might, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. On this night, Jesus tells us we need to stretch ourselves even more; we are to love one another as he loved us.

What does it look like to love one another as Jesus loved us? Oftentimes, this gets summarized as acts of service or servant-leadership. Let’s see what happens when we immerse ourselves into the details.

Jesus took off his outer robe and tied a towel around himself.
He poured water into a basin
He knelt in front of one of his disciples.
He picked up one foot.
He washed it.
He dried it with the towel.
He picked up another foot
He washed it
He dried it with the towel.
He picked up the basin, stood up, and then knelt in front the next disciple.

There is a rhythm to this repetition. Jesus is very deliberate, very intentional with his movements. There is a tenderness that can arise from being so close to another person that we can see the lines on their feet and the folds in their skin. Having been so close, we may begin to see and care for them in a way we haven’t before.

I’ve experienced this
 when I massaged my grandmother’s hands and feet when she was the hospital,
 when I held someone’s hands as I prayed with them,
 even when I got down on my knees to wipe the floors of my apartment or sat in the yard to pull weeds.

When we follow the way of Jesus to get up close, that proximity changes what is seen...by deepening the understanding of the one who sees.³ Here at St. Alban’s this can happen through the Community of Hope, the Daughters of the King, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, the way folks minister to one another in the children and youth ministries and so on.

Just as Jesus washed the feet of all his disciples, including the one who was slightly clueless, *ahem* Simon Peter and the one who would betray him, we are called to love as expansively as he did, to love in a way that expands the boundaries of who we love and how we love.

We care for those who are part of the St. Alban's community and their family and friends. Then we draw that circle wider and wider, expanding that circle of love off the hill to include those loved and care for by our outreach partners, El Buen Samaritano, Trinity Center, Menchaca Elementary School and so on.

When we follow the way of Jesus to get out there, we learn there is more to the world and more to ourselves and our capacity than we knew

When we feel like we're in limbo, almost there but not quite yet, we may choose to turn inward, to close off ourselves. By commanding us to love one another as he loved us, Jesus counteracts that tendency to draw into ourselves and shrink our social circle by encouraging us to get close to other people and to expand our sense of community. They may be for us a sign of grace that we couldn't have imagined, and we may a sign of grace for them in a way that we couldn't have envisioned.

This Maundy Thursday, as we wash each other's feet, as we strip the altar, as we keep the vigil, and as we leave the church in silence, let us contemplate how we might love more deeply and more expansively as Jesus did. For on this night and every time we approach the Holy Table, that is what we are called to do in remembrance of him.

Amen.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_8-ball#Possible_answers

² <http://definition.org/define/mandatum/>

³ <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/empathy-and-social-justice-the-power-of-proximity-in-improvement-science/>