

Maundy Thursday

April 14, 2022

Faith, Okemos

Exodus 12:1-14, Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19, I Corinthians 11:23-25, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

### **This Precious Gift**

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What wondrous love is this, O my soul! What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul?*

When I remember the celebration of Holy Communion this past Passion/Palm Sunday, when I remember the faces, many of your faces, especially the eyes of those who here received the bread and the fruit of the vine that morning, I think of how wondrous, how precious is this blessed sacrament. I think about this great inexplicable mystery, that Jesus would come to each of us in a morsel of bread, in the fruit of the vine, that all that he accomplished for us, his bearing “the dreadful curse” of our sins, his giving up his life for us, was actualized for you and me in the eating and drinking, in the hearing and believing these words, “The body of Christ, given for you...The blood of Christ, shed for you.”

With you tonight I think about the night when Jesus was betrayed, that dark night when for 30 pieces of silver, his disciple, Judas, would bring a detachment of soldiers and police to a garden where Jesus and his other disciples had now gathered after the last supper of which Judas was a part. And there the soldiers and police would arrest Jesus, bind him and take him away to be tried, brutally treated, and then sentenced to death.

Perhaps with you tonight I think about the dark nights in my own life, nights when I lacked courage to speak up for people who were neglected or unfairly treated or when I betrayed the trust of people who depended on me. I think of the dark nights when I truly felt lost and alone or when I way too quickly judged and condemned others for their perceived faults and behaviors (and failed to see the “log” in my own eyes). Or those dark nights when I failed to receive and fully embrace the forgiveness of my sins for which Jesus gave his life.

*The body of Christ, given for you...The blood of Christ, shed for you.*

What wondrous love is this? That Jesus would die for me, for my friends, for my enemies, for those I love, for those I despise. What wondrous love is this that Jesus would bind himself, “in, with, and under” the elements of Holy Communion? How in this beautiful sacrament, Jesus, crucified and risen, would enter into my body to assure me of forgiveness? What wondrous love is this?

*When I was sinking down, sinking down, when I was sinking down, sinking down, When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown, Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul, Christ laid aside his crown for my soul.*

It is important to remember that Judas shared in the bread and wine too. Jesus gave himself, his very life for the one who would betray him. It is important to remember that Jesus gave his life for Peter, who that very night repeatedly denied his association with Jesus within hours of declaring that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Just so it is important for us to remember that Jesus gave up his life for us who have failed him, who have not always trusted him or been loyal to him or obeyed his commands.

In another precious sacrament that marks the beginning of our life in Jesus' death and resurrection, in the cleansing water of Holy Baptism Jesus binds us forever with him as heirs of forgiveness and eternal life. Not unlike the earthly food of Holy Communion, the common water of Baptism together with name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is also holy water that cleanses us, body and mind and soul, a gift to be remembered and renewed every day of our lives.

And it is with God's precious gift of water that we are commanded by Jesus to wash one another's feet. Though in our day, in our culture probably not often literally, we are most like Jesus, our Teacher and Lord, when we serve each other in the humblest of ways. For Jesus washing another's dirty feet is what love looks like.

The word “Maundy” of which this night is named means “command.” It is striking and strangely powerful that this “new” and central command of Jesus is that we love one another, meaning that we serve one another in the humblest of ways just as Jesus loved us. St. Paul writes in the letter to his brothers and sisters in Philippi, *Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human form. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross...*

This precious gift, this wondrous love so graciously given to us in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion only grows and grows as we love one another, as we love our neighbors in acts of humble service, done without regard for praise or acclamation, done until our earthly journey has ended and we meet Jesus and sing with all the loved and forgiven children of God in glory.

*To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing; to God and to the Lamb I will sing; to God and to the Lamb who is the great I AM, while millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing, while millions join the theme, I will sing.*

*And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on; and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on; and when from death I'm free, I'll sing God's love for me, and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on; and through eternity I'll sing on.*

Amen.

JDS