

Sermon: Maundy Thursday

The Rev. Mike Wernick

April 2, 2015

Year B

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

We remember tonight... not only the Institution of the Eucharist... but the new Maundy... the new commandment that Jesus gave us... that we love one another... you know the hymn... *and they'll know we are Christians by our love*... [sing refrain]...

And if we understand that loving someone is more of a commitment we make... than a feeling we have... if we understand that love transcends our own preferences or opinions... if we understand that loving someone involves sacrifice... then when we love... we can understand *loving others* in terms of our baptismal covenant... then we also understand that we can *love*... even when we don't *like*... and when we love... and when we give... we are made one... because what benefits others also benefits us... it reminds me of the song we sang at my high school graduation... No man is an island... No man stands alone... Each man's joy is joy to me... Each man's grief is my own...

It's only when we begin to wonder *what's in it for me*... only when we begin to keep score... only when we... like Peter... reject a gift... refuse to be washed... it's only when we dig in our individualistic heels... when we resonate more with self-sufficiency... or with pride... or with anything that keeps us from being vulnerable... that we begin to foster division...

The new commandment that Jesus gave us... doesn't involve keeping score... or putting some people above others... but I do wonder how loving each other... could level the playing field... would make things *just* for all people... regardless of their circumstances... When we are grounded in the presence of God... when we know the ground of being to be our truest source... when we experience this kind of unshakeable

connection... when we know love in its deepest and purest form... then we'd be able to let go and let God... then we'd be able to live out the words that Jesus spoke in Luke 12... about how the ravens who neither sow nor reap are fed... and about how the lilies which neither toil nor spin are dressed better than Solomon... and all of this comes out of decisions based in love... come out of the same dance... which the Trinity dances... from love... and into love...

There are many people... many of us... who have reached or passed the point where this begins to make sense... but putting it into practice can be an entirely different thing... some of us are still working through family of origin issues... or unmet developmental dependency needs... there may be expectations placed on us that we don't know how to resist... or the fear that if we do resist... we'll lose love or status or money... many of us have made a lot of progress here [point to heart]... but collectively... corporately... the most significant challenges we face come from the systems which surround us... in far too many tragic ways... we have simply traded togas... for three-piece-suits...

And the landscape in which we live is not neutral... the systems which surround us reward feeding our bank accounts more than feeding the poor... allow people to make more money *from the earth* than by caring for it... there have been too many voting districts which have been redrawn to try and control the outcomes of elections... and too many draconian efforts at making it harder for people to vote... instead of doing what the Governor of Oregon did last week by just registering everyone to vote... We hear far too many messages which deflect blame and affirm certainty... than we hear about vulnerability and speaking truth to power... too many of the systems which surround us say *Me first... I come first... I like being served... I like being higher on the social see-saw*... very few people want to wash feet...

Theologian Mary Louise Bringle writes: according to one of the oldest Jewish commentaries... not even a Hebrew slave was expected to perform menial tasks like

washing feet... there are a handful of biblical references about *women* washing feet... but the majority of references that refer to foot washing as an ancient form of hospitality... simply refer to water being brought... so the guest can wash their own feet... so what Jesus did... was like making himself as vulnerable as someone at the lowest rung of the Indian caste system... an untouchable... an outcast... as someone who is despised... now that's pretty vulnerable...

Like Peter... many of us resist vulnerability... preferring to remain in control... when the Germanwing co-pilot decided to end his own life... he was resisting vulnerability... we've learned a lot about him since this tragedy... but like a lot of people... he probably thought...at some point... that acknowledging his illness would cost him not only his work but his income... and we all know that society dislikes the idea of giving money to people who don't produce... so even though he may have had a mental illness... he had to produce... until his vocation became a way for him to end his own pain... even though it created untold pain for almost 150 other families...

Yet almost all the talk on the news shows... at least what I heard... was about how to modify the cockpit doors and the switches that control them... and about not leaving just one person alone there... and there has been really almost NO talk about the ongoing need for better global mental health services... and how we can't control the human heart...

There has been no talk about how there are risks simply in living... but there has been... a deep seated implication about how our power enables us to control each other and control life... which acknowledges nothing about Mystery and vulnerability... and in doing so... we collectively contribute to a false sense of security... you might consider reading Barbara Brown Taylor's book [Learning to Walk in the Dark](#)...

Yet a fundamental fact of our human-ness IS our vulnerability and dependency... even though most of us live in cities and have electric power... we remain... like Job and

other primitive people... fearful of those things we cannot control... that's why we need each other... as vulnerable infants we submitted to being wiped clean by someone else... and many of us may confront such dependency again...

But Jesus points out to the disciples that those who cannot gracefully accept the gift of physical cleaning... are scarcely in a position to receive the even more humbling cleansing of sin... that occurs in his even more humiliating death on the cross...

And that's because... when we can understand and identify with... just how low Jesus lowered himself... then we must also acknowledge... that the divisions between us are lies... and that in spite of the gift of free will... in spite of how good we are at asserting ourselves... we are dependent on God... and on each other... much more than we can bear to acknowledge... and when we drop our guard... and remove our masks... we become even more so... the beautiful humans God created us to be... and when we understand how revolutionary... vulnerability is... and begin to live this way... the systems which surround us... and which resist the Kingdom... will change...

Holy God... help all of us be vulnerable enough... to receive your gift. Amen.

Mike+