

**Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021**

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

**Psalms 116:1, 10-17**

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

**Gospel of John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**TITLE: The Wondrous Love of God**

**‘Open our Hearts Lord Jesus so that more Light & Truth is breaking from your Word; and Holy Spirit, help us to hear what needs to be heard.’**

As we gather together in the name of Christ, we open our hearts to experience the wondrous Love of God as tonight we begin The Tri-du-um which takes us through the next three days of Holy Week, when we celebrate the most important events of the Christian Faith.

As we listened to the Scripture Readings you may have noticed that they are the same readings we hear every year on this day. We hear about the Passover, the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and a new Mandate given to us by Jesus. Having just spent the past several weeks of Lent in spiritual reflection, denial of self, devotion to God in fasting and prayer, hopefully we will have been renewed in our faith so that we can take this walk with Jesus from the Cross to the empty tomb. Scripture opens us up to see more fully God’s Love and Care for all God’s people, and there is nothing that is happening in the world that will ever separate us from the Love of God through Jesus Christ.

Hebrew Scripture tells the story of the first Passover which is faithfully followed by our Jewish brothers and sisters; the story of how their ancestors were taken from slavery to freedom and new beginnings as they prepared to cross the Red Sea into the Promised Land. This story for us Christians as told in Exodus is paralleled to Jesus as the new Lamb and we are saved by his blood. Jesus’ Resurrection takes us from slavery to freedom and opens us up to new beginnings.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians we hear about the Eucharistic Meal as it was instituted on this night by Jesus with his disciples. Paul was very disturbed by what the people were doing when they celebrated the Lord’s Supper and he wanted to reform

the worship practice of the people of Corinth. Paul wanted to make sure the people clearly understood that the saving death of Jesus was proclaimed in the Eucharistic meal.

For us it seems such a long time since we have all been able to gather to partake of the Eucharist, so it will be good for us also to be reminded that ‘The Body and Blood of Christ’ given to us at the Eucharist celebrates deliverance from sin by the death of Jesus on the Cross. Hopefully as we receive the Eucharist again it will be with renewed faith and understanding.

As we now turn to the Gospel, John focuses on Jesus washing the feet of his disciples which is tied to the Eucharist, because it is as servants that we come to the Table to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus along with his saving death.

John gives us two very powerful teachings of Jesus tonight and I hope we can hear these familiar stories with new insight and understanding as to how best we can live out the Gospel of Jesus.

I would like to do something a little different this year, and invite you to join me as we imagine ourselves in that Upper Room with Jesus and his other disciples to get a firsthand experience of what happened there on this Holy Night.

We are in a room that is very plain and only has a table and some benches on which we are all sitting. We have just completed the Passover Meal and we notice that Jesus gets up from the table take off his outer garment then wraps a towel around his waist and picks up a basin and pitcher of water. We look on with awe as we watch Jesus kneel before each of his friends and begin to wash our dirty feet; even the feet of the one whom we know will betray him.

When Jesus approaches Peter we hear his protest about not allowing Jesus to wash his feet. We too may be as confused as Peter as we watch our Teacher and Master, playing the part of a servant by washing our feet.

We hear Jesus say to Peter that if he does not allow him to wash his feet then he Peter can have no part of Jesus. Do we think that this may also apply to us? Peter now goes full circle and says, ***‘then not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well,’*** and Jesus tells Peter that there is no need to wash all of him because not all of

him is unclean. As we know, Peter would later deny Jesus three times; does this apply to us also, have we too denied Jesus?

As Jesus leaves Peter, we wait in anticipation as he now approaches us; what are we going to do, this is a first for us; are we going to be like Peter, or are we going to graciously accept Jesus washing our feet? As we feel the water being poured on our feet, the fact that God who sees all our flaws and brokenness sent his Son to lovingly stoop before us to do this simple humble act, is a very powerful realization as to what God will do for us.

Then Jesus says, ***“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them to others.”*** How can we not accept such a gift to also offer this loving act to others?

And as if this experience were not enough, Jesus gives us yet another teaching by saying, ***“A new Command I give you, Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”***

As we take time to reflect on what just happened to us in that Upper Room, how did it feel to have our feet washed, much less by Jesus himself? Did we get the feeling that maybe the washing of our feet was symbolic to the cleansing of that part of us that needed to be healed? Could this possibly have felt like a renewal of Baptism as the water was being poured on us? Whatever this Upper Room experience was for each of us, it certainly gives us something to think about. And as we think about the two new teachings that Jesus gave us, I do not know if any one of them is easier than the other to follow.

I think that being in the presence of Jesus gives us what we need to take up our Cross to follow him. How can we not now love and humbly serve our fellow humans? How can we ignore the pain and suffering and the injustices that goes on around us and not do something to bring healing? Are we not called to offer Hope and Love? But what we do know is that God is always with and for us, and with God’s help we **can** do these things.

I recently read a Meditation by Richard Rohr who had just met with our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry who explains what we just experienced, ***that we must accept God’s Love before we can love another.*** Bishop Curry went on to say, and I quote,

***“I have come to see that the call of God, the Love that bids us welcome, is always a call to become the true you. Not a doormat, but the true you. Not an imitation of someone else, but the true you: someone who is made in the image of God, deserving of and receiving Love.”*** We humans have a hard time accepting that we are deserving of Love, much less receiving it. And Bishop Curry goes on to say, ***“Sometimes we can only recognize God’s Love for us through the Love we receive from another person (whom God has loved well). The important part is that the flow of Love gets started.”*** ***“God’s Love is everywhere; in all things, and that, includes you.”***

This very much sums up what tonight is all about. God’s wondrous Love for each of us and how we begin to Love one another. Friends, it is a work in progress and that is why we continue to come to Church to be filled with the Grace of God to do the work we are called to do.

On this Holy Night, Jesus demonstrates what it means to humbly serve each other as we come to the Table to receive the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation; and he leaves us with a new Mandate, that we Love one another. And then we see God’s Ultimate Love in action as it is played out right before us as we now face the events of Good Friday.

***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in God shall not perish but have eternal life.”***

Oh what Wondrous Love indeed! **AMEN.**