

Mother Denise Muller
Maundy Thursday, Year A

Preaching while being recorded feels very different from preaching when we're all gathered together in person. The room is sparse and empty. When we're all gathered in this space, there's a personal connection and energy that fills the room that's missing right now. Gathering together for worship is one of countless losses we are experiencing these days. Losses that can evoke grief. What losses are you grieving? At the same time, I imagine, we're becoming even more aware of the people and things for which we're grateful. What are you grateful for? These days, in this strange space of social distancing, many of us are holding both grief and gratitude.

This year, as I reflect on the story of Jesus gathering with his friends for the Last Supper, I imagine Jesus joining each of us as we gather for supper in our homes this evening. Jesus inviting us to sit with him at the table, sharing with him what we're grieving and what we're grateful for. Jesus bidding us to join him just as we are... and Jesus reminding us how much we are loved. Jesus offering food, washing feet, wiping tears. And perhaps there is some joy and laughter as well.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus gathers with his disciples as a sign of deep friendship. Of love. A reminder to care for one another. This is the last meal they will share before Jesus is crucified. And it's not just a meal. It's a sign of what is to come. Jesus' body will be broken and his blood poured out for the renewing of the world. The Christ providing nourishment for our souls and for all of creation.

Following the meal, Jesus washes his friends' feet. They have been walking a long, expansive journey with Jesus for years. Across Galilee. Across Judea. And now they are in Jerusalem. After countless steps across dry, rocky, desert terrain, their feet have become not only dusty, but sore and tender as well. Jesus washes their feet, handling them with gentle care. As the dirt gets washed away, more skin is revealed. Some of their feet have scars, reminders of injuries and painful experiences from their past. Some of their feet have blisters, recent wounds they're still enduring. There's a vulnerability in washing feet that evokes the vulnerability that Jesus desires to have with us, invites us to have with him, and encourages us to practice with one another.

Feet are not just feet. They symbolize the tender parts of people's lives. Scars from the past. Recent wounds that are still healing. Touching and washing someone's feet and having your feet handled and washed by another are acts of vulnerability, an openness to caring for and being cared for by another. The way Jesus loves and cares for each of us.

Since we can't gather and wash one another's feet as we normally do for Maundy Thursday, I invite each of us to participate in a different way in the ritual we're sharing this evening. In this weekend's e-pistle there is a Liturgy of an Agape Meal for Maundy Thursday. Whether you are sheltering at home by yourself, are with a roommate, or with family, I invite you to follow along with this simple liturgy that is from the Episcopal

Church's Book of Occasional Services. My hope is that through this liturgy and meal, Maundy Thursday becomes a more tangible experience for you this Holy Week. That even though we are watching a recorded service online, we are actively encountering Jesus throughout these sacred days. As we all walk with Jesus in a different way this year, may God's presence be fully known to us. May God companion us through grief and gratitude. As we prepare for the way of the cross, may God lead us through death and resurrection, that we may enter into new life. Amen.