

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021

John 13:1-17, 31b-35 (NRSV)

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 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."

On Maundy Thursday, our world transitions into darkness. In this text, Jesus gathers with his disciples around the table for one last meal. Among the disciples, one who will betray him. Jesus is also in transition. He came from God, and will soon return to God.

We all meet at the Table on this holy day. Simon Peter will be there refusing that Jesus wash his feet. Judas Iscariot will also be there, and we'll wonder why he was complicit in Jesus' death? The beloved disciple is present, who will remain at the cross when the others have left.

On this day we are called to remember our call, remember what we have committed to, make confessions, and trust in God, who has been present from the beginning, at present time, and in the future. As we gather together, we will name all who are welcome at the Table - those who have betrayed others, and may do so again; those

who deny, and will swear before the night is over; and those who will claim who they are, not by personal behaviors, rather by their beloved.

Maundy Thursday is essentially a call to love as Christ loves all who gather at the table.

Prayer

Holy God as we gather at the Table today, let us appreciate who will join us there. Let us be sure to love them just as Christ loves us. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021

John 18:1-19:42 (NRSV)

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves

of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters[again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters[again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew[G] Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

On Ash Wednesday we began our Lenten Journey, and the examination of our lives. We've tried to fully confess our sins and wrongdoings over the past year, and looked toward the near year with intent to speak and act according to Christ's example. On Good Friday, we remember the crucifixion of Jesus, and recalling it seems to darken our world, and we become weary.

Today's scripture was quite lengthy, but good to read in its entirety. You may have paused several times while reading, perhaps found yourself trembling. The text began with Jesus' arrest in the garden, and ended with Joseph of Arimathea claiming his body and placing it in the tomb. Yet John's telling may provide some comfort for the reader. Jesus remained confident, in control. Jesus stepped forward in the garden and acknowledged that was *Jesus of Nazareth*. He was not silent before Pilate and spoke of *a kingdom not of this world*, carried the burden of a cross to Golgotha. Before his death he looked to his mother and the beloved disciple assuring them of their future care for one another. As the worst that humanity could offer was taking place, Jesus remained unfazed and triumphant. Soon the victorious resurrection of Christ would occur!

Close your eyes for a few minutes. Imagine you are witnessing a particular event(s) in this scripture (e.g. Jesus' arrest in the garden, speaking to his mother and the beloved disciples near his death). What did you see? What did you hear? How did it make you feel?

Prayer

Holy God. May we never forget this dark time, yet may be cling to the victory of his resurrection. Amen.

APRIL 2021 DEVOTION

Easter Day - Sunday, April 4, 2021

He is Risen! - Mark 16:1-8 (NRSV)

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

The three women were on their way to perform their last act of devotion for Jesus. It was time to make peace with Jesus, and his claim to embody the reign of God for the well-being and welfare of the world. They were grieving and letting go of the dream of God's reign.

As they approached the tomb, they found the stone had been removed. They encountered a man, dressed in a white robe upon entering the tomb. They are alarmed, frightened and amazed. The man encouraged them not to be alarmed, to find the disciples and Peter, tell them to go to Galilee where they would find Jesus as promised. Although they left in silence, not speaking to anyone of their encounter. Certainly their experience seemed surreal, yet their fear was not related to the man in the white robe talking to them. Rather it was the reality of the dream that was promised. The challenge and Jesus' ministry continued even following his death.

I think that Mark's account is very human. Can any of us honestly say that we would not have been alarmed (at least initially)? Perhaps the lesson here is that God persists. God is present when there is silence, in death, in our personal experiences and encounters with others. Wherever there is life, God will be present. God's promises are real. The Christ has risen indeed!

Imagine how you might have reacted as you approached the tomb and found the stone had been removed from the entry? How might you have reacted when you left the tomb?

Prayer

Holy God. We give thanks for your promises, and Jesus lives and his ministry that continues. Amen.

Sunday, April 11, 2021

Unity - Acts 4:32-35 (NRSV)

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The resurrection has become reality, and the early church is emerging. Luke reported about 5,000 among the community of believers. There was confrontation between Jesus' disciples and religious leaders, and the believers prayed and were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God.

In this scripture, we hear themes of unity among the community of believers and a distribution of resources for those in need. Although the believers came from different ethnic, ideological, and theological perspectives, Luke described them as *of one heart and soul*. If only we could claim that for the Christian church in our modern world, that we would be receptive to the unifying power and peace of the Holy Spirit. Instead we live in times of changes and divisions in our congregations denominations, in the United States and around the world. As Christians we cannot, and should not, deny Jesus' call to be peacemakers and to love one another, as Christ loves us. At this time, we must confess our sins, identify and reconcile ourselves with Christians and all of humanity.

The scripture said *There was not a needy person among them...*, yet we know far too many persons are living in poverty in our country and globally. We, like the early community of believers, are called to share our resources with one another, so that no one goes hungry or without clean water to drink, without safe living environments, without access to healthcare,... Jesus said, *From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.*

At this time, how can we as individuals and the North community, be peacemakers in our congregation and denomination, in our communities, in the United States, throughout the world?

Prayer

Holy Spirit. Speak to us. Empower us to be in unity and at peace with one another. Heal what divides us and lead us toward positive change for the good of all. Amen.

Sunday, April 18, 2021

Christ Lives! - Luke 24:36b-48 (NRSV)

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

The rumor was that Jesus was alive. The disciples believed that Jesus was dead, even though his body was missing, and they were confused by all of this. They gathered in Jerusalem to determine what was and wasn't true, and Jesus appeared among them. He greeted them and asked why they *were frightened and startled* (as though they had seen a ghost). As always, Jesus acted as though nothing unusual was occurring, but the disciples in that moment were indeed surprised. In *flesh and bones*, he appeared!

This scripture brought Jesus' labor and ministry full circle. Jesus was and is the redemption of all creation. From the law of Moses, it has always been about the reconciliation of the world to God - God's purposes, aims and agenda for creation, and repentance that leads to sins forgiven and the well-being of creation. As the risen Christ appeared to his followers, he assured them that he lives. They were prepared by his teachings and ministry, and are now commissioned to witness to others in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

The risen Christ lives. The message remains the same. We continue to be called to witness the good news to others, in our local communities and elsewhere. How am I , and how is our North community responding to that call?

Prayer

Holy God. Jesus' teachings and ministries teach us how to live. Through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to witness the good news to others in our communities and elsewhere. Amen.

Sunday, April 25, 2021

Love in Truth and Action - 1 John 3:16-24 (NRSV)

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

The way others are aware of our love is through our actions. God’s love was made known through Jesus. The laying down of our lives is about self-sacrifice for others that to be reflected living as Christians. We lay down our lives when we recognize that we do not own our lives, put others before us, let God lead our actions - in love for others.

Take a few minutes to list several ways that others have laid down their life for you. How did they act in love? How did you feel God’s presence?

Now write down several ways that you have laid down your life for others. How did you act in love? How did you feel God’s presence?

Prayer

Holy God. We are called to a life of self-sacrifice. Teach us to love in truth and action. Amen.