

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Maundy Thursday
April 1, 2021

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, each year we begin the Maundy Thursday service in a most unusual way.

Each year, we conduct the Maundy Sunday service with the sermon at the front end of worship, not in its customary place after the readings.

No, we begin the service with the organ prelude and announcements, and the opening hymn, and then we launch into the sermon.

The service begins with the sermon, even before we get to the confession, the Prayer of the Day, and the scripture readings.

Why do we do that?

Because this evening's sermon is meant to help orient us for the next few days.

PAUSE

Tonight we begin what is called the Triduum, which is Latin for Three Days.

Tonight we begin our journey with Christ, where we observe the great mystery of our faith, the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

Tonight, we observe Jesus with his disciples celebrating the Last Supper, during which time Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and gives his disciples a new commandment to love one another.

And tomorrow at our Tenebrae Service we will witness Jesus's death on the cross.

And come Sunday, we will observe our Lord's resurrection.

And this experience—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter...

This experience is not three different worship services.

No, the Triduum consists of one continuing service that begins this evening and concludes on Easter Sunday.

And as we experience this one continuing worship service...

As we journey with our Lord to his suffering, death, and resurrection...

We are called to take note of the trajectory of the path we follow with our Lord.

We are called to be mindful of the shape of this journey, the bend of this road, the track of this course.

For we will notice that the road does not so much bear left or right as it does downward and back up.

Yes, our journey dips sharply downward only to rise swiftly upward.

And this trajectory has a name, which I learned back in college.

PAUSE

Back when I was in college...this would have been sometime shortly after the invention of fire...

Back when I was in college, you see, I took a course on Shakespeare.

And one of things I learned in that course is the difference between a comedy and a tragedy, because we may remember that Shakespeare wrote both comedies and tragedies.

Shakespeare's comedies include:

The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer's Night Dream, The Merchant of Venice, and Much Ado About Nothing...

Shakespeare's tragedies include:

Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Othello...

Now, yes, to some extent that which distinguishes the two is humor. Comedies have humor, tragedies do not, or at least not as much.

But even more than humor, what distinguishes a comedy from a tragedy, and a tragedy from a comedy, is the trajectory of the drama.

A comedy begins at a high point only to experience trials and tribulations during the action, so that the track of the drama dips downward, but by the end everything works out, and we conclude again at a high point.

A tragedy, on the other hand, begins at a high point, but the trials and tribulations during the action takes the track of the drama downward, and downward some more, and maybe even downward some more, such that the drama concludes at a low point.

A tragic play never makes that turn upward again, like a comedy.

PAUSE

This is one of the things I remember learning in my Shakespeare class in college.

And these definitions of comedy and tragedy are helpful as we think about the experience of the Triduum.

For what we, sisters and brothers in Christ, are about to witness...

What we are about to observe as we make our way from Maundy Thursday, to Good Friday, to Easter Sunday is that which one might liken to a comedy.

The trajectory of our course is from high point, as we have just celebrated on Palm Sunday the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem...

The trajectory of our course is from high point, to low point, as Jesus will be betrayed by Judas, abandoned by his followers, arrested by the authorities, tried and convicted even though he was innocent, and crucified like a common criminal...

The trajectory of our course over these next few days then is from high point, to low point, back to high point on Easter Sunday.

The shape of this faith journey is that of a comedy.

The shape of this drama of salvation is that of a comedy.

The bend of this road is downward through the valley of the shadow of death, which will then come emerge again into the brilliant glory of God.

And so maybe it is appropriate that the Triduum begins tonight on what is April 1st, that is April Fool's Day.

Maybe it is appropriate that the Triduum begins tonight so as to remind us that even though in this experience it will look dicey for a while, like the Devil will win out...

Even though the drama of salvation will appear quite hopeless come Good Friday, God still has one more trick up his sleeve, and God will get the last laugh, and will declare to the Devil, "April Fool's!"

And so, friends, what we are about to see, to observe, to witness again in this journey of salvation is a trajectory that moves from high to low to high again.

PAUSE

And interestingly enough, our ancestors of the faith understood Christ's journey in just this way, too.

The early Church understood Jesus' walk the cross as one from high to low to high again.

The first Christians interpreted the path to the resurrection like a comedy.

Indeed, this Christian comedy is captured best in Philippians 2:5-11, which was our text for our midweek series at Good Shepherd in Paxtang throughout the season of Lent.

Philippians 2:5-11 speaks of Jesus who was in the form of God.

Jesus resided with God.

Jesus was literally at a high point, with God.

But Jesus did not regard his equality with God as something to be exploited, but Jesus emptied himself.

And Jesus came down from heaven and he was born in human likeness.

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death.

Even death on a cross.

But then God highly exalted him, giving him the name above every name. And at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Yes, early Christians understood Jesus' salvific journey as going from high to low to high again.

Early Christians though described Jesus' salvific journey not in terms of a "comedy," but in terms of humiliation and exaltation.

Humiliation (Gesture—downward) and then exaltation (Gesture—upward).

PAUSE

Now, in our present world, we should understand ourselves as still in the trough of the trajectory.

We should still see ourselves in the low point of the course.

For after all, our world, our human society still struggles with issues like race and bigotry, which evident in the fact that all eyes are glued to see what will be the outcome of a police officer on trial.

And our world, our human society still struggles with gender inequality, when what should be a simple thing like similar training rooms for men and women at a basketball tournament is a problem.

Our world, our human society still struggles with how to provide for children at the border while being mindful of what the unforeseen consequences could be if we just allow free access to our country.

Our world, our human society still struggles with how to function, how to conduct ourselves, how to be mindful of others during a pandemic.

Our world and society still struggles in so many ways...

And so we need to recognize that we are not yet at that high point on the trajectory.

We need to recognize that we still have work to do.

We need to recognize that we still struggle in the trough of this U-shaped pattern from high to low to high again.

PAUSE

But the good news is that there is the promise that all things will turn out okay, that is what this Triduum in the Church year reminds us a people of faith.

All things will turn out okay, because God is in control of the comedic trajectory of this life, as exemplified in his Son's humiliation and exaltation.

God is in control because God is ultimately victorious.

PAUSE

I read a quote the other day by John Lennon which captured this sentiment in a humorous way.

Lennon said, "Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end."

Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, right now, it must not be the end."

PAUSE

Everything is not okay, so it must not be end; we must still have work to do.

And the work we still have to do, sisters and brothers in Christ, is the work of servanthood.

It is the work of bending down low to meet the needs of the world so as to help elevate the downtrodden and the despairing.

The work that still needs to be done in this world is the work of servanthood, that Jesus himself embodied when he became a human.

It is the work Jesus himself embodied when he took the towel and washed his disciples' feet.

It is the work Jesus himself embodied when he was crucified, such that his witness was not that he came to be served but to serve.

The work that still needs to be done in this world is servanthood.

And you and I are called to be active in this work.

The work of servanthood is the work that still needs to be done and it is done in the trough, in the low places of life where there is need for justice, for compassion, for mercy, for kindness, for hope, for love.

PAUSE

This is what we are reminded today as we make our journey through the Triduum.

In the end everything will be okay.

But it is not the end, there is still more work to do.

There is the work of servanthood, which Maundy Thursday and Good Friday remind us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.