

What's Love Got to Do with It

The ancient designation for this night is Maundy Thursday. I remember as a child how confusing that was. I remember asking the pastor, "How can it be Monday when it's Thursday? It can't be both!" Being precocious, I wondered why everything was so different in the bulletin; nothing was the same. Why was there a basin and a pitcher on the altar? Why was there no benediction at the end of the service? Why was there the taking of everything off of altar at the end of the service? Why was there Holy Communion, it wasn't the first Sunday of the month? Why were in church in the evening, and on a Thursday? Everything was out of order. It was so confusing!

The pastor explained about Holy Week. He spoke about the special supper that Jesus shared with his disciples before he went to the cross. This was the night on which Jesus spoke to his disciples about the meaning of love with two special actions. Jesus put on an apron and knelt down before the disciples like a servant and began washing their dirty feet, just like a slave would do. Then after the meal, he took the bread and wine of the special meal as a sign of the sacrifice about to come. Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment to love one another just as he loved them. He concluded by explaining the word "Maundy" It was not Monday, but came from the word mandate, command , a direct order.

That's what this is night about. It is about the meaning of LOVE. The opening verse of the Gospel reading makes that clear. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." The reading ends with Jesus telling his disciples and us to do the same, to love one another, calling us to continue his mission of revealing God's love for this world. Not with a bland, generic kind of love for our fellow humans, but a deep love, a love enacted by self-giving, not keeping anything for ourselves, a radical love. This is the love he displayed by bending himself to the ground and touching the places that most need washing. This is the love he demonstrated by his giving his body and blood on the cross for the salvation of the world.

Jesus commands his disciples and us to share the love of God for all people at all times, at all places, with all religions, with all beliefs, with all races, with all social classes, with all tribes, with all nations, with all sinners, with all saints. Jesus' love is love without preconditions. Jesus' love is love without requirements, love without merit. His command to love is really a command to witness with our very lives, in all we do. We are to be so prodigal with our love that those outside will want to come inside. We are to be so recklessly wasteful with our love that the very world we touch will be changed by our loving one another. By doing for one another, we share our most effective evangelism.

Such a love is hard! No one said this following Jesus stuff would be easy. But that doesn't mean that we don't try! Just before the events of Palm Sunday, Jesus asks his disciples, "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" They answered, "Yes, sure we can." But they had no idea what he was talking about. Jesus' cup is a cup of sorrow, cup of anguish, a cup of -rejection, a cup of emptiness. Who would dare to drink of it? Jesus knows that. In the Gethsemane garden, he prays, "Father, let this cup pass from me." In that prayer of despair, Jesus shows us how hard this God love is to enact. But in that prayer, by connecting with

God, he comes to pray, "But not my will but thy will be done." That is a prayer we repeat so often in church and in our lives with the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us.

On our own this love stuff is an impossible mission. It is only by connecting with God that we can dare to do it. Let me give an example from science. If you put a piece of iron into the presence of an electrified body, it becomes electrified as well. It is changed into a temporary magnet in the presence of a permanent magnet. As long as you leave the two together, they will share the power of attraction. It is no different with Christians and Christ. When we stay close to him, connected to him, we are empowered which is impossible if we merely attempt to obey his command to love on our own. The love command creates an impossible standard to live up to, but Christ's power is even higher and guides us through. Christ invites us to come near enough to God's love that it becomes a part of us and enables us to show it, to share it with the world. The Holy Spirit empowers us. Go, love one another.