

Maundy Thursday 2020

Earlier this week, our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry said the following in his weekly meditation:

“There is a prayer that begins the Good Friday liturgy that may be perfect for this time. It's found on page 276 in the prayer book and it prays, "Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this, your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and given into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross. Who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen." That may well be a prayer for us this Holy Week. He continues:

"Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this, your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed." Over the years that I've prayed that prayer, almost some 40 years now as a priest, I've often asked myself the question, who's the family? Who's the family we are asking God to behold? Is it the family of faith? Those who have been baptized and accepted and follow Jesus as savior and Lord? I think that's true. But is it bigger than that? And during this Holy Week, in the midst of COVID-19, I believe we must pray it, praying it bigger than praying for ourselves. I have a feeling this prayer is for the entire human family of God". (Unquote)

Many Episcopalians, and I would dare say, many Christians simply do not celebrate Holy Week. Many go from Palm Sunday right to Easter.

There are a lot of reasons for this including work and family obligations which seem to take precedence. Often after a long winter, warm spring days are starting to appear; there are gardens to plant, and outdoor activities beckoning us. For others, Jesus's path to the cross is

too painful to bear. We can listen to the Passion account on Palm Sunday but then we are ready for the joys and celebration of the Resurrection.

But this year may be different. This year many of us are frightened, anxious, and yes, even a little bored with all of the sheltering in place. We are worried about our families and we keep a close watch on what the virus is doing to our communities, the nation, and the world. More of us are turning to prayer and looking for God's continuing presence in our world. Our family **is** growing.

Tonight, feels different. Those with families around them can still celebrate a seder meal in person. Can still wash another's feet or someone's hands, in person. Those with Internet access can do this remotely and still share the prayers together. What is so amazing this year, over many previous years, is that we are deliberately extending our families to anyone who wants to join us in prayer and remembrance. Reaching out to anyone seeking companionship, friendship, and love. No one is left out. No one is exempt. Everyone is wanted and needed to be community. All or loved by God with no exceptions.

Jesus performed a very humiliating act of washing his friend's feet. We tend to look back at the culture of that time to see how humiliating and embarrassing this was. But think about it. Even today, if we wash the feet of others in our congregations, it is usually well planned out ahead of time and a dozen folks have been pre-warned so that they are prepared to have their feet washed. Nice clean socks. There is no doubt in my mind that like Peter, if we did this randomly, more than one would decline. It is embarrassing to have someone wash your feet. For the disciples, this was an act of a servant. Jesus was sending a message of what we are all expected to do for each other. It was also precursor for the greatest act of

Love which was to follow. An act of love so great that we are also expected to love each other with a love so intense that we give up our own lives if necessary.

Tonight, we experience this by washing another's feet or by watching it done. Tomorrow, we experience Jesus' betrayal, his trial and his death on the cross. Jesus was telling his friends and us, that we must go through this with him to get to other side, the Resurrection, and eternal life with God.

As we travel this road of COVID-19 with each other, we pray for all our loved ones, we pray for those in our communities, we pray for those in our state and in our nation. We pray for our sisters and brother in the world and yes, this means everyone. When we come out on the other side of this, we can then serve all the children of God in whatever way we are able.

AMEN!