

Sermon

1 April 2021

John 13:1-15 (16-35) Maundy Thursday

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

Rev. David Martin, Deacon

Theme: Love is the Forest

My dear friends in Christ, I would like all of us to stop for a moment and take a long, deep, breath.

Let's do that together. OK?

Take a deep breath in.

And then, let it out.

Let's all do that together again.

Take a deep breath in.

And then, let it out.

I would like us all to take a minute and relax. Clear our minds. We are in the middle of Holy Week. It is a long, intense journey from Palm Sunday, through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday....and culminating with Easter.

We have spent the last five weeks of Lent journeying together through those 40 days with various devotions, studying the saints, gathering in book groups, and acknowledging Lent in our own personal ways of self-denial or taking on additional tasks.

Lent and Holy Week are not for the spiritually feint hearted. There is a lot to take in – a lot to think about – a lot to endure. There is a lot to endure because we are acknowledging that Jesus endured a lot for our sake. Lent and Holy Week are indeed serious business.

This evening, we celebrate Maundy Thursday. This is the day we commemorate Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and the sharing of the Last Supper between Jesus and his friends. These are big ticket items. Jesus washes the feet of his friends to illustrate how they must be servants to everyone in order to follow him. During the Passover meal, Jesus tells his disciples that every time they eat such a meal, they must always remember the sacrifice he is about to make.

That is a lot to contemplate. And we've already been inundated with so many heavy topics this week. I was reminded of this in Children's Chapel this past Sunday. We read a storybook about the last week of Jesus life. So much happens. So much for us to remember, be thankful for, and pray about.

Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey while people cheered “Hosanna’ and waved palm branches.

Jesus dined at the house of his friend, Simon, where a woman anointed his head with expensive perfume.

Jesus visited the temple and was so angered by the commerce going on instead of prayer, he threw the merchants and extortionists out on their ears.

Jesus also taught in the temple and drew the attention of the Pharisees, scribes and politicians who wanted him gone.

He has a last supper with his friends, washes their feet, and watched one of them leave in order to betray him.

He will go to a lonely garden to pray.

Jesus will be arrested and treated like a criminal.

One of Jesus’ closest friends will pretend not to know him while all the others run away to protect themselves.

Jesus will be tortured, forced to carry his own cross to his execution, and then die on that cross between two common thieves.

He will then be laid in a tomb and buried.

That is a lot for us to digest in a week. Our liturgical calendar gives us no time to rest as we worship and contemplate all that happened for our sake.

And that is why I suggest we all take several long, deep breaths. It is difficult for us to comprehend all that takes place in Holy Week. It is overwhelming.

And I fear that by attempting to concentrate on each of these important events during Holy Week, we may fall victim to a familiar cliché. Perhaps we cannot see the forest for the trees. In the case, the trees are all these events we see – front and center right there in our face - during Holy Week.

If that’s true, then what is the forest?

Tonight’s Gospel reading begins with this thought: **“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.”**

Our reading continued with Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and the lesson they are to take from that experience: Be servants to each other and to everyone you meet.

What follows in John, Chapter 13, after we stopped reading is Jesus telling his friends that one of them will betray him and Judas, his betrayer, leaving the meal.

Then Jesus explains he will be leaving them and offers another lesson. Jesus says **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

This evening, I suggest THAT is the forest. LOVE is the forest. We might just get caught up in all the individual events of the Holy Week – those are the trees – and fail to see the forest. **Love is the forest.**

Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end. Jesus instructed his friends to love one another as he had loved them.

We hear that Jesus loved his disciples “to the end.” I suspect we think that means Jesus loved them until the end of his earthly life. But the original Greek which has been interpreted as “to the end” actually means something more like “to perfection” or “with as much love as is possible.”

The word “maundy” comes for the Latin word “mandatum” – which means commandment. Tonight, we are observing Commandment Thursday. And the commandment is to love one another.

The love that God has for us – a love so great that he sent himself in human form to die for our sins – is the reason we concentrate so hard on all the events of Holy Week. That love... shown **FOR** us and then entrusted **TO** us to show to one another... is the very essence of our annual commemoration of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter

Let us not forget that love is the forest which surrounds us.

Yesterday was International Transgender Day of Visibility. The event is observed annually to celebrate the lives of transgender people and raise awareness of discrimination faced by our transgender siblings as well as acknowledging their contributions to society. As I offered prayers in my daily devotions with special intention for our transgender friends and family, I came across someone I didn't yet know.

Rev. RJ Robles is a Puerto Rican queer and transgender community organizer, healer, and Christian minister. I found a writing of Rev. RJ in which they describe wrestling with their faith growing up because they knew they were different.

Rev RJ wrote: “By the time I went to college and came out as a transgender person, I had outgrown the message of hate and fear that many churches were then preaching. Even though I did not quite have the language, what kept me believing in God, Jesus, and the Holy

Spirit was my fervor and rootedness in the theology of love – first and foremost the love of God for God’s entire creation, love for myself, and love for my neighbor.”

This evening it is my prayer that each and everyone of us may be filled with that same fervor and rootedness Rev. RJ Robles describes - fervor and rootedness in that theology of love.

Love that that will enable us to love every person to perfection....to the end.

Love for one another just as Jesus loved us.

Love which shows the entire world we are disciples of Christ.

Love for one another that makes us eagerly and happily act as servants to our fellow humans.

Love as gentle and tender as washing the feet of a loved one.

Love as bold and radical as washing the feet of a total stranger.

Love as deep and rich and dense and tall as a forest.

Even when we may not quite have the language, what must keep us believing in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is our fervor and rootedness in the theology of love – first and foremost the love of God for God’s entire creation, our love for God, love for ourselves, and love for our neighbors.