

Maundy Thursday 2020

Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

April 9, 2020

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

One way to cope with everything this COVID-19 crisis has thrown our way is through humor. Maybe you've seen the meme of a man holding a baby at arm's length, standing at least 6 feet away from a pastor who is holding a super soaker water gun aimed at the baby. Since the baby's wearing a christening gown, we know this is a "remote" baptism. The helpful friend who sent it added this message: "In case you weren't aware of this new technique...."

I would've also needed a super soaker for any footwashing we were going to do on this Maundy Thursday evening. But our Worship & Music team had already decided before Lent began that instead of footwashing this year we'd have individual absolution with the laying on of hands at the Communion rail for any worshipers who wanted it. But social distancing dictates **that** won't be happening either. Even in the old days when Holy Communion was celebrated just once every few months, you could count on it being served on Maundy Thursday. We will be celebrating the Sacrament tonight, in obedience to our Lord's command that we do this to remember Him, but since **all** of us can't receive, **none** of us will, a strange and unexpected version of the traditional Lenten fast that will extend into the Easter season and until we can gather in person again.

But our Lutheran tradition says there are **two** means of grace, **two** different, holy rivers by which God's love flows into our lives: **Word** and Sacrament. The **Word** blesses us all tonight.

We just heard Dave read to us the story of the first Passover from the Book of Exodus. It is a story our Jewish brothers and sisters revisited last evening, the first night of Passover. Like us, many of them livestreamed their seder to join with family and friends across the miles. For instance, Cindy & Tony in Florida participated in a seder happening in London! Usually one of the Passover prayers is, "Next year, in Jerusalem." I imagine this year the prayer was added, "Next year, in person." That's our prayer, too. "Next Holy Week, in person." One doctor interviewed on TV, Ezekiel Emanuel, put our current sacrifice of separation in context when he said, "This is what we have to endure now in order to be alive to celebrate next year."

There's another meme that shows the typically long Last Supper table with Jesus seated in the middle. The difference is that no one else is seated at the table with Him, and there's a bottle of Purell by His place setting. We understand that the disciples are participating remotely, because we see little boxes with each of their faces hovering at the top of the picture, just like on Zoom or Google Hangouts. In another version of the same meme, Jesus is asking, "OK, OK. HELLO EVERYONE. JUDAS, YOU ON?"

As we know, Judas was on-line all right. He was on-line for betrayal. In St. John's account he's still present when Jesus washes His friends' feet, an act of tenderness, love, servanthood. In those days washing someone else's feet was considered so "down and dirty" that even a slave couldn't be commanded to do it. But Jesus willingly, enthusiastically, took it on Himself. Jesus was Master of the symbolic act, a true Artist drawing creative signs, like turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:9), feeding 5,000+ with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish (John 6:11), writing in the dirt when the crowd wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery (John 8:6-8), giving sight to the man

born blind (John 9:7), raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43). As Jesus poured water out of the pitcher onto His friend's feet, He was anticipating the pouring out of His lifeblood on the Cross the next day. The emptying of the pitcher stood for the self-emptying of Himself that we heard about recently in the letter to the Philippians, chapter 2. Paul says:

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

*⁷ but **emptied** himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Two of the most important verses in the New Testament, actually in all of Scripture, come at the end of tonight's Gospel:

"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."

Hopefully you can name your own examples of **footwashing** in this time of pandemic, self-**emptying** in this time when we're tempted to **fill up** our shopping carts and pantries with toilet tissue and bottled water, **extending** oneself in this time when we have all the permission in the world to withdraw, hole up and look out for #1. In New York City every night at 7 o'clock people open their windows or step outside to shout "Thank you!" to health care workers putting their lives on the line for others. We could add hearty thanks

to our transit workers, food preparation and delivery people, mail carriers, day care workers, social service employees and so many others.... There was a picture in the paper of “Thank you’s” written in colored chalk in many languages on the sidewalk outside of Montefiore Morningside Hospital , also in New York. Maybe you saw a news clip of an older man crying as he held a sign up to the window of the emergency room at Morristown Memorial Hospital in Morris County. It read, “Thank you for saving my wife’s life!” In last weekend’s sermon I put out the call for homemade masks for the staff of a Toms River nursing home. This morning I delivered 2 bags full of beautiful, colorful, lovingly sewn masks to Janet, our church friend who serves as Director of Nursing at that nursing home and contacted me with the need.

“Love one another as I have loved you.” What a reminder that even when we are not **receiving** the Body of Christ, we are called to **be** the Body of Christ. Amen.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham