

Maundy Thursday
April 21, 2011
Mark 14:12-25

“On the Lenten Road: In an Upper Room”

The Lenten season draws to a close with sundown on this day – a day we call Maundy Thursday. The forty days of the Lenten season give way to the Three Days, the *Triduum*, of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Vigil and Sunday. These Three Days are one unit, a seamless whole; one flowing into the other as we are drawn deeper into the great mystery of our faith: Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. Over the course of these forty days, we have traveled on the Lenten road to the desert, in the night, at the well, in the pool, at the grave, and on a hill. The mystery of these Three Days begins this evening in an upper room.

In this upper room in Jerusalem Jesus demonstrated for his disciples what humble and loving servanthood looks like by doing something only a servant, a slave, would do: wash feet. If Jesus humbled himself and became a servant, can it be any different for us? In doing so, Jesus gives to his disciples – and to us – a model for our life together, as he tells us: **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (John 13:34-35). This was the Gospel lesson for Maundy Thursday that was just read. It is in this new commandment that Jesus has given that the name for this day, Maundy Thursday, is taken: Jesus’ *novum mandatum*, his new command. As Jesus’ Maundy Thursday people, and following his example, we roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty. We do feet!

Also in that upper room Jesus gave to his people a feast of love that we still celebrate to this day, and will celebrate until the day of Christ’s coming as Paul reminds us in the Epistle reading: **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”** (1 Corinthians 11:26). The meal which Jesus instituted is rooted in that Passover meal which we heard about in this evening’s Old Testament reading (Exodus 12:1-14). It was the blood of the sacrificial lamb painted on the doorposts and lintels of the homes of God’s people that saved them from the tenth and final plague that the Lord God brought upon the gods of Egypt: the death of the firstborn. In this Passover meal that commemorated the angel of death passing over the homes of God’s people in the land of Egypt, Jesus becomes the new sacrificial Lamb whose blood is shed. Just like God’s people of old who were rescued from slavery in Egypt by the blood of the lamb, we have been rescued from slavery to sin, death, and hell through the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

It is tempting for us to just remain in that upper room, removed from the noise and hubbub of the world. But Jesus did not stay there, and neither can we. We follow Jesus out of that upper room, down the stairs, out into the darkness of night and all that is before him. We follow Jesus to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane, where he will sweat great drops of blood in his anguish of prayer: **“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done”** (Luke 22:42, 44). We follow Jesus as he is arrested; shuffled from one sham trial to another; mocked, beaten, tortured, and sentenced to death by crucifixion – something reserved by Rome for the worst offenders. We follow Jesus

as he carries his own cross to the hill of Golgotha where he is then nailed to the rough wood, and then dies an agonizing death as he cries out: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Matthew 27:46). We follow Jesus’ lifeless body as he is taken down from the cross by friends and placed into a borrowed tomb. We follow the women to the tomb early on the first day of the week at early dawn (Luke 24:1), and hear the astounding news: **“He is not here, but has risen”** (Luke 24:5). This is the story of salvation – the story of our salvation – that is revealed in these Three Days, and it begins in an upper room.

My friends, what Jesus began in that upper room so many centuries ago continues with us here this evening. That feast of love which he instituted on the same night in which he was betrayed still nourishes and strengthens us in our following Jesus. The very Body and Blood of our Savior is given to us here at the table of the Lord under forms of bread and wine for forgiveness, life, and salvation. **“Do this in remembrance of me,”** Jesus said (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). And so we come – remembering, repenting, receiving, rejoicing, responding to all that Christ Jesus has done for us. We come as the people of God ready to receive the gifts of God, not because we are worthy but because the Host at this feast, the Lord Jesus himself, has invited us. He is the One who makes us worthy. Amen.