

Hello. I am Alan Naylor, the interim priest in charge at the Anglican Church of St. John the Divine in Courtenay, BC. Today, (well this evening really) we begin the three days which are at the core of our Christian faith and take us from the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, to the cross on Good Friday, to the tomb and to Easter morning resurrection.

As we turn our thoughts to this day Maundy Thursday our prayer book puts it this way:

This is the day that Christ gave himself into the hands of those who would slay him.

This is the day that Christ gathered with his disciples in the upper room.

This is the day that Christ took a towel and washed the disciples' feet, giving us an example that we should do to others as he has done to us.

This is the day that Christ our God gave us this holy feast, that we who eat this bread and drink this cup may here proclaim his Holy Sacrifice and be partakers of his resurrection, and at the last day may reign with him in heaven.

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, as we prepare to enter the mystery of these three most holy days, we ask you to fill our hearts and minds with the hope and promise of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. May we experience his love in the washing of his disciples' feet that we may reach out in the same love and service to one another. May we know Him in the breaking of bread that we may be ever fed with the spiritual food that is his body and blood. We ask you this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Please now be attentive for the reading from the Gospel of John chapter 13.

Before the festival of the Passover, 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. During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "*Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*" Jesus answered, "*You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.*" Peter said to him, "*You will never wash my feet.*" Jesus answered, "*Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.*" Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "*Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 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.*"

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The name Maundy Thursday, comes from the latin word *mandatum* from which we get words like *mandate* or *command*; it's a day when we honour 2 mandates given by Jesus the night before he was crucified. First we honour what he called a new commandment - to love as he has loved – and this we usually do by re-enacting his washing of friends' feet. And the second mandate is to continue sharing bread + wine in the same way as that last meal, to remember his sacrifice. "*Do this in remembrance of me*" he said, which we do knowing he is present with us in our gathering and in the sacrament.

But it's not only the Maundy Thursday actions on our mind this night, it's also what is to come. We remember what was a simple yet meaningful meal, and a startling act of humility in the washing of feet; but then there comes a heart breaking betrayal, torture, a crude wooden cross, forgiveness offered from that same cross, and the silent vigil next to a tomb with a dead body.

Every year as I experience all of those facets of Holy Week I find myself thinking about the human side of this ordeal. Our language for Jesus usually dwells on his divinity - Son of God, Messiah, Saviour of the world; but this week, one is reminded more than any other time - of his humanity - that he was flesh + blood + emotion; that he faced a real, agonizing, physical death. The gospel writers describe a very human Jesus, vulnerable, but determined not to avoid what lay before him. It's a bit of a puzzle really - why a very human person who knew sadness, pain + fear as much as we do – how and why he would walk into that vortex of emotion + pain + violence so willingly + so confidently.

Well, the answer to that question comes very clearly in some of the words we read from John's Gospel. There are lots of words read this week, I know, but one of the lines that always strikes me, is one we read a few moments ago:

“Knowing that he had come from God and was going to God, Jesus got up from the table... and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” ‘Knowing that he had come from God and was going to God....’

There’s no greater sense of purpose + confidence + serenity than that which comes from knowing one is walking in God’s way, and that it’s God who stands ahead of us waiting to meet us in our future, wherever it is. That I’m sure is what reassured and fortified the human Jesus as he faithfully completed his mission. He knew he’d come from God and was going to God. The striking part of those words is that upon realizing how important he was in God’s plan for the world - how great his mission was - a realization which would lift most people to heights of superiority- even arrogance - from such a lofty position of self importance, what does he do? He calmly and humbly removes his outer clothing, takes a towel and water, and gets down to wash his friends’ feet.

It’s mind boggling if you think about it. Supreme power kneels down to frail human weakness; self importance becomes sub servient to need; status becomes the servant of love. That kind of graciousness can come only from the kind of emotional security + stability we see in the human Jesus - facing all manner of stress + suffering, with confidence and with tranquility, which enabled him to set aside any fears or bitterness or doubt, even as they must have swirled around him. That’s an important lesson for us. It’s with our knowledge that we have come from God and are going to God, that we can face our own stress + suffering with a peaceful heart. Our own self assurance of God’s love for us, gives us that kind of emotional security and stability which enables us to notice the needs of others; it comes from confidence in our role in the great mission of the church. Para phrasing those words from John’s Gospel “We realize that we have come from God and are going to God, and so like Christ we are able to get down and figuratively wash the feet of others” – insecurities and self importance set aside.

That’s the good that comes out of the pain of this week and of this night - as we anticipate our celebration of resurrection, it’s the knowledge and assurance that we are safe and secure in the love of God - even while our very real fears and trepidations swirl around us – especially during this pandemic time - that’s the foundation of our faith and of our ability to live lives which reflect the perfect way of Christ. **Amen.**

Let us pray. *Loving God, our creator and sustainer. In this time of pandemic and anxiety, calm our fears, give us wisdom and deep peace within. We give thanks for our federal, provincial and municipal leaders, for those who work in healthcare, and those making available the things we need for daily living. Enliven the hopes of those who are downcast, give healing and wholeness to the sick, and encourage us all with an awareness of the closeness of your Holy Spirit during these worrying times. Amen.*

And now if you wish, please pray with me the Lord’s Prayer.

Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours. Now and forever. Amen.

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in the knowledge and love of God. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you, be with all those you love and all those you pray for, now and always. Amen.