

## MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

On Maundy Thursday we remember. We remember Jesus took some normal, coarse bread and blessed it, broke off pieces and gave them to his disciples. The words he said have been remembered and retold throughout history. Jesus is telling us that he is in these common elements and when we remember him we call him to the present and invite him into our midst to use us.

He also picked up a pail of water – water, which nourishes and sustains our very lives - and took a rough cleaning cloth and did what nobody would have ever foreseen or even wanted in a million years. He washed their feet.

Peter responds like we all would, “Lord you will never wash my feet! Stop it!” He couldn’t imagine that this Jesus, who he believes is the Messiah would stoop to perform such a menial task as washing feet that only a servant would do. Jesus response to Peter is “If I do not wash you, you will have no part in me,” and then goes ahead and washes Peter’s feet.

Why do we memorialize this on Holy Thursday? Because the entire relationship of human beings to God is to receive love and give back love, no matter what the cost. If Peter will not allow Jesus to care for him in this very earthy way, he will be refusing the gift of God’s love. In essence he would be saying, “You can’t love us in that way.”

That’s why Jesus replies, “I do not want to be Godly in the way you imagine.” Loving like Jesus means giving up the image of ourselves as being powerful or important in favor of sharing Jesus' unconditional love with another human soul. Jesus act which we recreate is an act of vulnerability, intimacy and humility. Yet, we still recoil at being this vulnerable.

Several years ago, a priest named Walter was asked to lead a three-day retreat. For the first two days, Walter gave meditations and led discussions. Everything he did and said encouraged the participants to open themselves to God and to one another. Yet they chose to remain emotionally distant from each other. They made light conversation, told an occasional joke, and that was all.

The second night, Walter could not sleep. He realized that the participants were afraid of sharing their true selves with one another. Each participant was highly invested in projecting a strong "together" image to the rest of the participants. As Walter prayed about this, a remedy for the situation occurred to him.

The next morning, during the first meditation, Walter handed each participant several sheets of red construction paper. He instructed them to tear off a strip of paper and attach it to a place on their bodies where they had been injured in some way. When they had all done this, he told them to keep attaching red paper to the sites of not just physical injuries but emotional and mental injuries as well until either all their paper was gone or they ran out of injuries.

No one stopped until every strip of paper was attached somewhere. Walter asked everyone to look around the room at the sea of red, which represented their woundedness. As they saw the outward signs of their brokenness, most of the participants also broke through their outer defenses. The sea of red proclaimed that everyone suffers, that we are all wounded, and that none of us can save ourselves through our own power.

Jesus asks us to love one another as he loves us. To do this, we must first accept the unconditional love he gives to us, and then we must share it the way he shared it: through the sharing of our true selves - wounds and all. This is the choice we can make right now by opening up ourselves to Jesus' unconditional love for us. Jesus does not just show us the way; he is the way, the truth, and he is life. Amen.