



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

March 20, 2008

Maundy Thursday
Reverend Donna Barr

Let us pray.....Almighty God, we pray that your love may be found in us, your servants. We know not how to love as we ought; but you who are love can reveal it to us. Show us the way to love. Amen

As a young child I was often in worship with my two closest friends: Susan, of the Jewish faith and Gayle, a Roman Catholic. Going to the Synagogue or to the Cathedral was always something I looked forward to. As I look back, I realize these early experiences were leading me to The Episcopal Church. Both the temple and the church were full of traditions that I had never witnessed in my protestant childhood. I was mystified by the beauty of their traditions and found myself excited to be included when the families invited me to Mass or Hebrew prayer services. I asked questions about everything and watch intently as the Rabbi and Priest presided over the liturgy. Even at a young age I realized that I was witnessing something significant – that I was actually participating in, as we Episcopalians say, “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

I vividly remember as a teenager, attending the Stations of the Cross, at St. Paul’s Catholic Church..... the congregation moving to each icon and understanding for the first time the gravity of Jesus’ sacrifice. I saw it....I felt it..... and I actually participated in it ...I wanted to be connected to this kind of worship. I was drawn to a liturgy, where the work of the people is the expression of an authentic Christian community - where worship points us towards “the word becoming flesh and truly dwelling among us” Our Episcopal Church is such a community of faith, full of sights and symbols and actions.....all moving us closer to God and one another. From the architecture of our buildings to the location of the Baptismal Font, to the procession, the colors on the altar, to the placement of the hands of the priest as he or she consecrated the Eucharist and to the Deacon’s dismissal at the end of the service.....everything..... literally everything has a reason and purpose pointing us to God.

Our liturgy tonight is quite dramatic. For what we do this night commemorates the washing of the disciples’ feet by Jesus Christ, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, and the giving of the new commandment by Jesus: “Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. The Holy Eucharist and the washing of the feet are living reminders of Jesus’ commandment. As the priest celebrates the Eucharist.....we ponder Jesus’ words to love one another and together we all give thanks.....for in this action as we are partakers of God’s perfect love for us. In the washing of the feet, we practice loving our neighbors – our friends – our families –loving the stranger – and also loving our enemies. This action is best symbolized to the role of the Deacon.... meaning the one who serves and who stand as a symbol of the servant hood of all believers, especially among the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the neglected.

At the end of this service we will remove all things from our altar and take away our status trappings as a symbol of our attention to Jesus’ command. He invites all of us this night to lay down the things that give us special status, to remove the masks that hide our real selves and to present ourselves humbly, and vulnerably.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

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To become humble and small requires a loving heart, purified of its fears and human securities, ready to love and forgive. Jesus invites us to actually live the Gospel - not to judge - instead to have compassion for all mankind. I try very hard to remember this loving quote that "Everybody you meet carries a heavy burden."

In May 1373 Julian of Norwich lay on what she fully expected to be her deathbed – and received a remarkable series of visions, many of which graphically dealt with Our Lord's suffering and death. Some thirty years later she wrote in the "Revelation of Divine Love" that she had prayed for years to understand the meaning of these visions. She finally received the understanding. "Wouldst thou know the Lord's meaning in this thing? Be well aware: love was his meaning. Who showed it to thee? Love. Why did He show it to thee? For love."

Tonight's gospel recalls Jesus' last actions of love on this earth. Jesus Christ, though He was in the form of God, emptied himself – and being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death. This earth-shaking act of divine humility is simply beyond our comprehension –but here at the Last Supper we see it enacted before our very eyes. God-became-Man.... is the Master who then becomes Servant and Friend. This act of love embodies the full meaning of his life, his teaching, and his entire ministry among us. "Wouldst thou know the meaning in this thing?"

For me, Maundy Thursday is our Church's most significant liturgy. As a privileged child of the 20th century, I wonder if I have really ever grasped the import of Jesus' model of servant hood. Yet this is what Jesus asks us to be on behalf of him. Will others know we are Christians by our love as the song says? What manner of love is this, which is so thoroughly self-giving? Wouldst thou know the meaning of this thing? Tonight we have the privilege of loving and serving one another as a sign that we too want to live in relationship with God and our neighbor. It is also a sign that we yearn to be people of forgiveness, to be healed and cleansed and to heal and cleanse others and then to live more fully in communion with Jesus.

"For I have set you an example," Jesus said, "that you should do as I have done to you."

Pray that it may be so.....Amen

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