Maundy Thursday March 29, 2018

All Saints’ Church Year B

*From Hymn 313: “Thou didst give thyself for us; we pray now to give ourselves to Thee.” Amen.*

A friend called me the other day to ask me how I was ‘holding up.’ “Isn’t this the biggest week of your year?” she asked with sympathy.

“Yes, yes, so true, yet it’s an amazing experience…. This week tells such an incredible story of passion, intrigue, betrayal, love, death, fear, shame, victory, forgiveness, and hope, involving the full range of any and all human emotions. And the story will carry me, carry parishioners, carry all those who attend the services, to ***wherever each one of us needs to go***, ***wherever each one of us needs to be carried***. We’re not in charge. The story is. We’re just the tag end of a prepositional phrase: Christ with us, Christ for us, Christ in us, carrying us where ***we need to go.”***

And so our story continues tonight. We refer to this night as the Last Supper, yet tonight is not just about a meal. In my imagination, I see a wooden table, long, roughly carved, positioned at one end of a room, maybe an upper room, with not many windows. The room is dark, with low ceilings, lit by kerosene lamps and candlelight. There’s Jesus and his disciples seated around the table, but that’s not all who’s present. All of us are crowded into that room as well. All of us, packed in, and we are all trying to get a view of Jesus, maybe even a turn to speak with him.

The room is hot with human sweat; food and wine are being passed around. It’s a feast, and there’s much excitement, joy, and anticipation. We’ve been with Jesus non-stop for the last few days, ‘cause something is going to happen. We don’t know what, but something is going to give, and our lives are going to be changed forever, for the better. Finally! Jesus is going to step up to the plate, to win, to overthrow Rome’s power brokers (those evildoers) and to usher in the reign of God as King.

Ever since Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, we’ve been following him. While Jesus entered into Jerusalem from the east, on a donkey with simple song and palm fronds, the Roman entourage entered into Jerusalem from the west, on stallions, with chariots of steel and songs of thunder, marching in with their political oppression, economic exploitation, and religious authority: with their elite pyramid of power in full display.

From one end of town comes Jesus. And who does the Son of God have gathered around him? He has Us… the poor, impoverished, down-trodden, broken, hungry, tired, and needy; we’re all there and we are all hoping for a miracle. Save us Jesus!

And from the other end of town comes Rome. And who does the Divine Right have? He has Themselves…. the powerful, the wealthy, the world’s nobility, the land owners, the politicians, the educated; they are all there, and they are not hoping for a miracle. They are the miracle.

Let’s return to our raucous-packed room.

Imagine this room- who do you see gathered?

I see my neighbor and best friend. Her daughter just married, and we are worried that her new family will not love her like we do. I’m in grief. I forget sometimes, but then the pain, the loss, comes roaring back. I see the town’s tax collector; he, who shall not be named. I often pray that I will have the chance to spit on his grave. But not tonight. Oh, and there’s the young girl, a victim of shocking violence, who read her poem in the town square just a few days ago and as she read, the emotions welled up in her and she threw up in front of everyone, in front of the world as she knew it, and she said, “Oh, that felt great.” So gutsy. There are the elders, teachers, and lawyers, sitting next to the zealot who’s packing a knife for protection. Could over there, on the other side of the room, be a Roman centurion? There’s the grandma whose grandson was killed in her backyard. And Judas, the thief, dipping his bread with Jesus.

Who do you see? Who do you see gathered this night? And where are you sitting?

The place is packed, throbbing with life and death; we are all pressing, leaning into Jesus, and then he gets up from the table. “Hush….shhh, he’s about to speak.”

But he doesn’t say a word. He gets up, takes off his outer rob, strips down to his underwear, and ties a towel around himself. He pours water into a basin, and like a Slave, he leans down and begins to wash the feet of his disciples.

There’s an audible gasp. Only Simon Peter objects, “No Jesus, you will never wash my feet.”

“Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”

“Then wash all of me.”

Peter is speaking for all of us…. Yes, wash all that we have, all that is dirty and pure, better or worse, lost and found, all of it… our love, our hates, our fears, our weaknesses, our strengths, our courage, our privilege, wash it all, dear Lord, wash it all.

In that tender washing, we are all found, and what Jesus has found in us, he loves. And he then asks us to do a simple and radical thing: to love each other in return, friend and foe, all of us… The most difficult commandment of all- to see each other, even those we hate, to see each other as Jesus sees us, to walk in his footsteps, and to serve, to give, to share, to be vulnerable, and to honor the best we have in each other.

Yes, the powers to be are to be overturned, but not by violence, but by the King of Love. Love is the cause and essence of everything. Love turns the wheels of heaven. We’ve all been kissed by our beloved, right on our foreheads.

We are Jesus’ love story.

Jesus speaks: “Don’t be afraid. Where I am going, you cannot come. Yet, in my dying, there will be life.”

Everything is coming down to this one final act of washing our feet, serving, dying, so that we can inherit the Kingdom of God’s love. Jesus is more concerned with our loss of hope than with his death. And it makes no sense.

We are invited into this senselessness, into this night’s liturgy, into these next few days, as we bear our souls, in the washing and in the stripping. Tonight, Jesus will be taken away from us, to be executed, and we will be bereft.

In our sorrow, we are called to remember Jesus’ words: “I will be back and take you to myself forever. You will have my presence always. And no one can take that away, never, ever.

“And in your steps, in your touch, in your reach, in your capacity to give, you will join me as The Christ, as the Body given to the world not to be served, but to serve.”

AMEN