

MAUNDY THURSDAY 2011

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1, 10-17; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

April 21, 2011

Central, Anchorage

LOVE AND FORGIVE

Why do we come here this evening? Perhaps it's habit—a good habit. Plenty of Christians, probably the majority, skip these holy days and wait until Easter morning to bring their worship. Why do we come here this evening? Perhaps we understand and even appreciate that these days—Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and also the Vigil—are fully integral to Easter, that somehow we need, we require, these special holy days to lead us, even carry us, from the upper room, to the cross, and to the empty tomb. We must walk with Jesus, the whole journey.

To walk with Jesus, the whole journey, my dear friends, is the definition of discipleship, the meaning of the Christian faith, the purpose of the Christian church. You know that. It's not about membership in a religious club. It's not about getting a ticket into heaven, or impressing others, appearing pious and holy. It's about following, walking together with Jesus, the whole journey, living faithfully in the Way of Jesus. It's about walking wet, wet in the waters of our Baptism. It's about the narrow gate and the hard road that leads to life. That's what Jesus was teaching all along the way—in the sermon on the mount, parables, occasions of conflict and controversy—you name it.

That's what Jesus was teaching his disciples that night in the upper room, as he shared his last supper with his friends and followers. He was teaching them what it means to live faithfully, to walk in his Way. It's a journey in which we love, serve and forgive. "Having loved his own, he loved them to the end." Then he showed them how to love, serve and forgive.

During supper, he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, wiping them with the towel. When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Master, *you wash my feet?*" Jesus answered, "You may not get it now, but you will come to understand." Peter said, "No. You will never wash my feet!" Jesus said, "If not, then you have no part in me." "Then, Lord, not my feet only but my whole body!"

After washing their feet, putting on his robe and returning to the table, Jesus said, "You call me Teacher and Lord. 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. Blessed are you who do it.

Little children, I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so love one another. People will know you follow me because you love one another. . . If you love me, then follow in my Way. Do as I say. Do as I do. Those who love me keep my word and follow in my Way.

I give you my Holy Spirit, the Advocate, so that you may abide in me and I in you. Like the branch must abide in the vine in order to bear fruit, so you must abide in me. I am the True Vine, you are the branches. Live in me that I may live in you. Make your home in me and I will live in you. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Love one another the way I love you.

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, gone for good. If you hold onto them, then there you are, holding on, carrying them about."

I grew up the second son of Kenneth Petersen, a veteran of World War 2, a Marine in the South Pacific. We never heard much at all about that war from my father. Then my older brother and I learned that Dad had a purple heart for being wounded in battle. To find the medal, to show her sons, our mother had to search for it behind the socks in our dad's dresser drawer.

One Saturday afternoon, my brother and I walked to the movie theater for a matinee screening of a movie about the battle of Tarawa. As we walked home we were excited and keyed up by the manly valor and glory of war. Our dad asked what we had seen at the theater. We told him the movie was about "the bloodiest battle in Marine history," the battle for Tarawa. He said, "I was there." We were excited to hear some war stories, but about all Dad would say was, "Many men died, including my friends. War is not a movie and it's not a proper story for boys." Not until my father's funeral did we learn that of the men on his landing craft, he and the lieutenant were the only two to survive that day.

Now we watch images of war on TV, bombings of cities and the like. We send missiles, smart bombs, from far away while we watch on computer screens. There is great tension, even contradiction, between the way of the world and the Way of Jesus. The way of the world says, "hate, curse and kill your enemies", whereas Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Are we Christians merely paying lip service to Jesus, largely ignoring his teaching for our lives and avoiding the cost of discipleship?

On this Maundy Thursday, we focus on four commands or "mandates" of Jesus: (1) wash feet; (2) love one another; (3) share the Meal of his presence; and (4) forgive. The world thinks that one wins by putting others down, making others lose. The world does not know the peace of Christ, the peace the world cannot give. The world knows revenge and retaliation. Jesus says that love rules, that peace is the way. Get out the towel and basin and wash some feet. Love one another. Forgive one another. Look to the cross.

More than once I've had dialogue with someone who thinks this way of Jesus is tripe. Turning the other cheek and going the extra mile might work in the loving family, but certainly not in the world. The only way that works in the world is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Armies and weapons work, not love and forgiveness.

First, show me, show me how war and hate achieve peace. Second, you mean it's good to love Jesus, but not to obey him? Don't keep his word, don't follow him, abide in him, or make my home with him. And yet, tonight, we sing "Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est." "Where true charity and love abide, there is God."

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is who we are. Beloved, we are God's children now. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. We love because God first loved us.

To God Alone Be Glory.

Amen.