

Maundy Thursday
Shalden 2019

John 13. 3-11

Let us pray:

On this most Holy Night, a sleepless one for many, a sleepless one for you, we draw around the story of the first Communion in the Upper Room.

Draw us into the story as we remember you this night we pray.

In the name of the ...

One of my favourite stories about Holy Communion is what happened when man first landed on the Moon.

Forgive me if you have heard me tell you this story before, but just before 3.17am, on the Sunday of July 20th in 1969 Neil Armstrong had decided to take over the controls of the Lunar Module to see if he could find a better place to land on the Moon.

There were rocks everywhere and the planned site was not looking good.

Miraculously, with just seconds of fuel to spare, he managed to land the impossible flying machine in one piece and the world changed forever.

Once the dust had settled, and their heart rates had returned to something vaguely normal, Buzz Aldrin reached out for a small container, which he had brought with him.

Truth be told, it was something that even NASA didn't know about.

He then requested radio silence and during this time he took out a small plastic package, which contained some bread and a container of wine.

Taking a chalice he poured in the wine. In the one-sixth gravity of the Moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup, and then settled down.

He then read the scripture: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit."*

In his own words, he said that as the Eagle's metal body creaked, he ate the tiny Host and drank the wine.

He gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility.

He found it extraordinary that the very first liquid ever poured on the Moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements.

Like those brave men landing on the Moon, there is often a time in life when you cannot simply turn back. You either land or crash, you can't just turn back.

Tonight, it is too late to turn back. The events, which pull us like gravity toward the cross, unfold before us, and we are helpless to keep them from coming.

The majesty and celebration of Palm Sunday is now but a memory and we feel ourselves moving toward Calvary, the cross appearing over the horizon, whether or not we want it to, or feel ready, or feel *"up for it"*.

I used to work in the largest cancer hospital in Europe. It was a difficult job, but not for the reasons you might expect.

What made it so hard for me was not that so many really wonderful people with whom I worked died, but how overwhelming it was to walk with them when they knew that their time on earth was coming to an end.

It was the life just before the death that left me in complete awe.

I spent my time listening to people tell me of their plans for their final days on earth; relationships they hoped to mend, or strengthen, places they hoped to see.

I watched as they searched for what they might be able to do with the increasingly precious time they had left that would give them a sense of having lived a more complete life.

What I listened to most, though, was how deeply they wanted to know how they would be remembered, for what they would be remembered, that they would be remembered.

What had their time on earth meant, and what would it mean after they were gone?

Had it made a difference at all that they walked the earth?

And so many of them would explore these difficult questions of themselves and of those whom they loved.

Recently a palliative care nurse completed research in what people most regret when they come to the end of their lives.

At the top of the list is this:

I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

Secondly,

I wish I hadn't worked so hard.

This was especially true for the men who regretted missing their children's youth and their partner's companionship.

At number three:

I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

And number four:

I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

The list goes on.

St John writes that,

"Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father."

On this day that we remember in our Maundy Thursday liturgy, that Jesus knows that the cross is coming, that his time among his disciples, walking, fishing, talking, teaching, is drawing to a close.

What difference had it made that he came and lived among them?

How would he be remembered?

Why would he be remembered?

Would he be remembered?

All the teaching and healing, but did the disciples understand?

The mustard seed, the fig tree, the wedding banquet, the prodigal son, did they get it?

The man born blind given sight, the nets full of fish, Lazarus raised from the dead, what did they think it all meant?

Would they get it after he was gone?

Would they remember?

With less than 24 hours left on this earth, Jesus gathers his disciples together away from the crowds in an upper room.

But there is something different about the room they are in.

Though they are gathered together for a meal, there are no servants running around making final preparations, no slaves waiting to wash their dusty feet before they recline together at table. There is no sound of cooking in the kitchen.

They begin to feel uneasy as Jesus rises from his place, takes off his robe, and ties a towel around his waist.

What is he doing?

They look at each other.

What is going on?

One by one Jesus washes their feet.

He washes everyone's feet.

And as he washes, he looks at them, but they look down, or away.

He shouldn't be doing this.

Why is he doing this?

He washes Judas' feet.

What does it mean?

Then, a last word, a final commandment.

Whatever they have heard during Jesus' time with them, whatever Jesus taught, the parables and healings, the meals and the miracles, this is it - this is what it all meant.

"Love one another."

"Love one another as I have loved you,"

Jesus tells them.

It sounds easy enough, but as they look down, trying to avoid eye contact, their newly washed feet confront them.

"Oh", they think, "he means Love one another like that."

And Jesus says yes, love one another like this.
Remember me like this.
Sit at table.
Take bread.
Break it, like my body will be broken, and share it.

Pour out wine, like my blood will be poured out,
and share it.

Feed one another. Love one another.

When you do this, you will remember me.

Before the authorities come and take Jesus away,
before they try to shame him, ridicule him, spit on
him, before they strip him of his robe to nail him
to a tree, in the upper room,
Jesus takes off his own robe, ties a towel around
his waist and takes the lowest place, the place of
shame, the washer of feet.

Before they can break his body on the hard wood
of the cross, and pierce his side to spill his blood,
Jesus, at table with his friends, breaks his own
body in the bread to feed his disciples.
He pours his own blood into a common cup.

Tonight we come together here for rituals that,
for many of us, have become familiar; they are our
tradition.

But these rituals, are radical, counter-cultural
acts, actions that lead us, whether we like it or
not, to walk with Jesus.

A walk that leads to the cross.
And from the cross to the grave.
And from the grave to resurrection.

The upper room awaits.
The cross beckons.
This is where love leads us. Amen.