

“A Basin, Some Bread, and Betrayal”

April 14, 2022 – Holy Thursday

Selah: Life in a Minor Key series

So, it all happened when Jesus and his disciples were eating the Passover meal together. They had probably celebrated it together before, but this night was different. This week had been different. Something was happening as the mood started to change. There weren't any more shouts of *Hosanna!* Now there was a sense of something else – not a celebration, but a commemoration, and maybe even a sense of gathering doom. They had always gathered for Passover and remembered the story of the Exodus – the Passover lamb and God's saving love for them. Tonight, though, it was different.

Jesus had washed their feet – something completely unexpected, something not fitting for a Teacher to do. But it seemed important to Jesus that they understand it – this act of service and love. And the meal ended with Jesus changing its meaning. This wasn't simply about something that happened a long time ago to their ancestors. This meal, Jesus said, was a time to remember him and the gift of God's salvation.

A basin, some water, some bread, a cup – these simple, everyday things were transformed on the night that Jesus and his friends gathered. Washing feet became an intimate act of loving service. Bread and cup became something much more than simple sustenance; they became the very gift of life and hope and grace offered to people who needed it. Even as all of this happened, they were plotting his death, some were struggling to understand what was happening, and others were sure of themselves - that they would never be the ones to betray him.

Those who gathered at the table needed grace, and so do we. This is a part of walking this journey with Jesus – not skipping over the tough parts, but living into them, engaging more deeply so that we don't take for granted the gift of God's salvation. There is no greater love, no more intimate act, and no more powerful example of servant leadership than what we experience tonight.

But along with it, along with the simple gifts of the basin and water, bread and cup, there's the acknowledgement of betrayal. Jesus knew the pain of it. And if you're struggling with that pain, you're not alone. If you've been the one to betray someone, you're also not alone. We come with sense of both - having been betrayed and having been the ones to betray others. I wonder if Jesus felt like the psalmist – trusting in God's care and feeling the weight of betrayal.

Throughout this Lenten season, we've been focusing on Psalms as a source of hope for us and an example of honest faith - even being honest about our deepest pain. Hear Psalm 41 from *The Message*:

- ¹⁻³ Dignify those who are down on their luck; you'll feel good—that's what GOD does.
 GOD looks after us all, makes us robust with life—
 Lucky to be in the land, we're free from enemy worries.
 Whenever we're sick and in bed, GOD becomes our nurse, nurses us back to health.
- ⁴⁻⁷ I said, "GOD, be gracious! Put me together again— my sins have torn me to pieces."
 My enemies are wishing the worst for me; they make bets on what day I will die.
 If someone comes to see me, he mouths empty platitudes,
 All the while gathering gossip about me to entertain the street-corner crowd.
 These "friends" who hate me whisper slanders all over town.
 They form committees to plan misery for me.
- ⁸⁻⁹ The rumor goes out, "He's got some dirty, deadly disease.
 The doctors have given up on him."
 Even my best friend, the one I always told everything
 —he ate meals at my house all the time!— has bitten my hand.
- ¹⁰ GOD, give grace, get me up on my feet. I'll show them a thing or two.
- ¹¹⁻¹² Meanwhile, I'm sure you're on my side—no victory shouts yet from the enemy camp!
 You know me inside and out, you hold me together,
 you never fail to stand me tall in your presence so I can look you in the eye.
- ¹³ Blessed is GOD, Israel's God, always, always, always. Yes. Yes. Yes.

I wonder if Jesus had any of these feelings as he shared a meal with his friends, even the one who would betray him. I wonder if he had those feelings as he washed their feet - this act of loving service - knowing that they wouldn't go with him all the way - that they would turn away and become fearful. Maybe that's where we find ourselves, too - right here, wanting to be faithful, but knowing that sometimes we aren't.

I read some challenging words that speak of the heaviness and holiness of this night: *Jesus was fully aware that these were his final days on earth, yet he spent his time washing feet.* This is what was important – engaging in loving service and telling his friends that others would know his love because they loved in his name.

And then I read this: *When we learn to sit at the table with our Judas, then we'll understand the love of Christ.* That stopped me in my tracks. How do we comprehend the depth of Jesus' love? How can we possibly comprehend it? What else is there to do except give thanks that our worst isn't enough for God to give up on us?

In a moment when we're struggling with the reality of war, violence, grief, and heartbreak - far away and in our communities – how do we hear this new command

to love? Not a suggestion or piece of advice – but a command or mandate to love. That’s where we get the name of this day - Maundy Thursday - from the Latin word *mandatum* which means mandate or command. That’s how the world will know who Jesus is – by the love his followers reflect.

Tonight, that’s where we are - with this act of loving service, with this meal laid out for us and for everyone, with this new command to love in Jesus’ name. Everyone was welcome at the table – even those who would soon turn away, even those who would betray him. Everyone is welcome at the table still – even as we struggle to walk with Jesus through this night and into tomorrow, as we make the choice every day to walk with the One who came not to be served, but to serve, to walk with the One who gave his life so that we could have abundant life, to walk with the One who offers us freedom, new life, and hope.

Let us pray as we come to the table...this is a table of grace...