

Maundy Thursday, St. David's Episcopal Church, 4/14/22 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Tonight, the Triduum begins, the start of the sacred three days that comprise the holiest part of Holy Week. Tonight, we remember the Last Supper: Jesus getting betrayed and arrested. We normally remember this night with a foot washing, but we aren't doing that this year. So instead of reading the passage about foot-washing from the Gospel of John, tonight we get Luke on Eucharist. This is the passage that has the classic eucharistic actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. Take, bless, break, give.

But even though we don't have the reading about the foot-washing, Jesus' words reflect humility. He speaks of kind and benefactors but says let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leaders as one who serves.

Is this the kind of leadership that you exercise? I remember being a brand-new deacon learning the ropes from my then-rector. He told me, "We don't have any prima donnas here. Being ordained doesn't mean you and I are better than anyone else on the staff or in the church." So on my first Sunday, the day after I was ordained, when a woman I didn't know informed me that there was a blockage in a toilet in the women's restroom, I went to the supply closet, found a plunger, and was walking into the bathroom when the rector, still in his Sunday robes, saw me. He started laughing and said, "You'll do just fine." But I know the privilege blinds me, and that sometimes I don't serve when I should. Passages like this one help. Jesus is always a model.

Maundy Thursday is an ideal time to reflect on humility, and that isn't being less than we are. It's acknowledging that none of us are any better than anyone else, *and* also acknowledging what our particular gifts are. God loves you, and God has given you a specific set of gifts that no one else has. What are they, and how are you going to use them to serve? Saying that you aren't good at something that you are actually good at doesn't mean you're being humble. Being humble means that you use your gifts to serve God.

This service is a big swing of emotion. It starts out pretty happily, like the Last Supper did. They were enjoying themselves, enjoying being together. And then everything took a dark turn. They went into the garden to pray, and then Jesus was betrayed by someone the disciples all love and was arrested. Arrests at that time often led to execution. They went in one evening from a party to darkness.

We are doing that tonight as well. We will share a meal from the holy table, and then completely strip the altar, even taking the sacrament from the ambry, disposing of it, and turning off that light that signifies the presence of Christ. We go from a party to darkness.

We worship a God who understands the swings of emotions we go through in our own lives. Here in church, we might have a wedding and a funeral in one weekend. Once in my last church, I went to the hospital at midnight one night to pray for someone in my parish who had died, and again the next night at the same time in the same floor of the same hospital to bless a brand-new baby. Or in my personal life, last October I had an essay published in the Atlantic, a major publication I never dreamed I'd be in, then the next day found out that I had new nodules in my lung. From party to darkness in a short amount of time.

Just two years ago, we didn't get to share Eucharist on Maundy Thursday. I pray that never happens again. The Eucharist is always a party, and Maundy Thursday is the most important day that we have to remember that party. I used to urge you to feel its absence on Good Friday and Holy Saturday so that we would rejoice even more on Easter, but I don't feel like I can do that anymore, after we endured months without it. Those were some of the roughest months of my life and showed me that my theology is more sacramental than I realized. Now I want us to revel in the Eucharist tonight and then again on Saturday night and Sunday morning, and I hope that you all will also join me here again tomorrow night, and on Saturday during the day, not to feel the absence of the Eucharist as much as to honor Jesus.

Savor the taste of the Eucharist before the grimness of stripping the altar.