

Living Faith - Maundy Thursday, April 14, 2022

On this evening some 3200 years ago, the Israelite slaves gathered in their huts and around fires, preparing their Last Supper in Egypt. It was a night of fear – the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, the Angel of Death, would be released to kill all the first born of the nation. Moses was preparing the people for flight at dawn.

They had to sacrifice and eat their lambs and goats, but in a manner by which the blood would be collected to paint over the doorposts and lintels so the Angel of Death would pass over.

Then the escape – the run, the panic, the sea before them, Pharoah's troops mustering behind them.

Israelites were being freed and would be formed as a nation, as the People of God.

Almost 2000 years ago, on what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus sat upon a donkey and rode into Jerusalem, followed by a ragtag band of characters – surprised disciples, hopeful followers, curious hangers-on.

On the same day at the same time, on the Western Entrance to Jerusalem, came the Roman Legions. Witnesses from those times tell us there was nothing more intimidating than seeing these Legions of armed and powerful men, in perfect formation, moving towards you.

It was Passover. It is now assumed that Jerusalem would have had a population of about 40,000 people. During this week, the population would swell to 200,000. Pilgrims from all over the Roman and Greek provinces, plus Israel itself flooded into the Holy City.

During the first days of this week, Jesus had confronted the Temple powers, upsetting the tables of the money changers, calling for a renewal of worship.

The Israelite establishment was compromised – they were concentrating only on sacrifice and purity, neglecting the prophetic words of Scripture, the reliance on God alone. So Rome must be appeased so peace could continue.

In real-politic, the demands of Rome would trump the proclamation of Jesus and his couple of hundred motely followers. Jesus became a wanted man.

Now we find him with his disciples in a secure place (they thought) where they would celebrate Passover. We can only imagine the thoughts of the disciples:

- Fear
- Confusion
- More fear!

What kind of a mess had Jesus got them into? Could they escape the City? Run for their lives? Or would God intervene and lead them to safety as God had 1200 years before? They were studying Jesus for a sign.

The sign came. Jesus got up from the Table, took off his outer cloak, wrapped a towel around his waste, and proceeded to wash the disciples feet.

{Just as an aside – for Passover people tended to lounge on their sides. They would lay on a couch, on their left side, prop their heads with their left hands, freeing their right hand to take food from the dishes on a round table – don't try this at the Village Restaurant!}

Jesus, doing the Servant's work, comforting these 12.

- Peter protested then wanted a bath
- Even Judas had his feet washed

Of all the possibilities that night, this action was astounding.

No pep talks; no heroics; rather meeting fear with human touch, love, devotion.

No recriminations. Jesus knew who would betray him; he knew the bold Peter would deny him; that all of them would scatter, though John would return later with Mary to the Cross. But he blessed each one, made them a part of his life in a way that is more intimate than even the Lord's Supper.

Where do we see this devotion today? Oddly enough, in the Ukraine. Putin's armies arrive in power and slaughter the innocent. People gather amidst the violence to look for the old, the lame, the frightened, to carry them to safety. Despite the eventual outcome, Russia has already lost the war.

Despite what Pilate or Caiaphas thought, despite what Emperor Augustus thought - he who called himself the son of God - Rome's power would not overcome those gathered around the Table with Jesus.

Russia, China, Covid, Climate Change, the Destruction of Flora and Fauna –

The Poverty of 2 billion people

The plight of 100 million displaced people

The mental health crisis among the young in our society

6 people died today from Opioid poisoning

Indigenous peoples suffering from the wounds of our own settler greed and violence

We are frightened and feel helpless.

I know! Foot-washing is not practiced so much in many churches these days. Those of us in Northern Climes are not really willing to reveal our soft, white tootsies.

Once in Malawi we had a foot-washing. It was not traditional and we were not sure if the Elders would agree. But a large number showed up, eager to experience this rite. We were running out of warm water when an Elder appeared: "He whom we all feared". His orthodoxy was legend – even if not quite as orthodox as he thought. Was the Wrath of God to come upon us?

He sat down in his chair, took off his sandals, and when the water flowed over his feet I can still hear the loudest sigh I have ever heard.

All was well with the world!

In the midst of the chaos in Egypt

- In the midst of the capitulation of Jerusalem to the Romans
- In the midst of our fear and trauma

One wants us to allow him to minister to us – with the basin, with the plate and cup. Everyday gifts made Sacred by the One who offers them.

The short-term odds for us are never promising - we will not bring in the Kingdom in the next decade.

The Good News is that we do not have to!

The Kingdom – the Reign – of God is present even as we gather.

We start anew like Jesus, refreshing one another, honouring one another, valuing one another – seeing ourselves not as lonely units here and there, but joined to the One Body that has endured since the days of Abraham and Sarah.

Said Jesus: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The other truth – the Spirit moves ahead of us. There are others, many others, yearning to receive what we already have been given.

Take courage and do not be afraid.

Amen