# *Last Lessons*

April 13, 2006 (Maundy Thursday)

Exodus 12:1-14a Psalm 78:14-20,23-25 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 John 13:1-15

*And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*

During my year as a hospital chaplain, I had the privilege to be with people and their families as they prepared for death. I was also able to be with my parents when they were dying. It is a precious, holy and very difficult time.

It is also a very pressured time –even more so in a modern hospital, the smell that hospitals have, the constant humming and beeping of machines, the voices on the P.A. system, the nurses working overtime, straining to keep everyone as comfortable as possible.

But the greatest pressure can come from ourselves, from a desire to leave some sort of legacy, to bequeath a heritage of words and wisdom, Some last words are comic: General John Sedgewick, a Union commander in the Civil War, was reassuring his soldiers that they were safe from Confederate snipers. His last words were "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist…" And some have a noble simplicity. Henry Ward Beecher left this life saying, "Now comes the mystery."

On this night, we celebrate our inheritance from Christ, who on the night before he was handed over to suffering and death, gathered his friends together for one last Passover sader. If the gospel stories are anything to go by, Jesus had been struggling for years to teach them his basic message. Peter and James and Simon and the rest seemed so obtuse sometimes. Words alone obviously were not going to do the trick.

Perhaps they were people who learned by doing rather than by hearing. When I was a teacher, I found that the students who were put in the advanced class were all visual and auditory learners – children who could learn by listening to the teachers lecture at them, who learned by reading what we wrote on the blackboard. The students in the remedial class were tactile, kinesthetic learners – students who learned by touching and doing and moving. Once I changed my teaching style to match their learning style, they began to excel. Perhaps the disciples too were people who learned by doing rather than by hearing; students who needed Jesus to show them and touch them and wash them, in order for them to get the message.

So on this night, Jesus was to give them their inheritance, our inheritance. They may have expected, and wanted more – great numbers, great riches, the glory they glimpsed at the feeding of the 5000, the rumbling voice from heaven at the transfiguration on the mount. Instead, he washed their feet, and then broke bread with them.

Jesus stripped down to his undergarments, like a servant, like a slave, and knelt at their feet, their dusty, callused, road-ravaged feet. And then, as Matthew and Luke and Mark's gospels tell us, as Paul recounts in his letter to the Corinthians, as we remember at every Eucharist, he broke bread and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying "Take, eat. This is my body broken for you. Whenever you do this, do this in memory of me."

This was Jesus' bequest, his inheritance – Serve one another. Break bread together. What I love about Maundy Thursday is how we bring together these three things: Service. Sacrament. Suffering.

The suffering is hard to avoid; suffering is part of being human in a broken world. Service and sacrament are what give us the strength to not only to survive that brokenness, but also in the breaking of the bread, in the bowing down before our neighbor, to thrive and grow in that brokenness, to be raised up with Christ.


© 2006, The Rev. Devin McLachlan.

Unlike some evangelical preachers I will not promise you that being Christian will make you wealthy and comfortable. But I do know that the fellowship of this church, the love we show one another, help us get through each day, especially the difficult days, and that sometimes the best way to get through a difficult time is to serve someone else. What a relief it must have been for Jesus to set down the honor of being their rabbi, and return the love he had for his friends by washing their feet, by caring for them.

Suffering. Service. Sacrament.

Unlike some evangelical preachers I will not promise you that being Christian will make you wealthy and comfortable. But I know that the sacraments of this church, the outward and visible sign of God's inward, invisible, and very real grace – the sacraments of this church give us the courage and the love and the peace that can only come from God.

What a comfort it must have been to the disciples, after Jesus' death, to come together again and break bread, open a jar of wine, to share and remember, to tell each other the story we continue to tell every Sunday.

So come to the chairs here, to have your feet washed and to wash your neighbors feet, to serve and be served. Come to the table, to break bread together. Come to the Altar of Repose to remember the inheritance we have been given through Jesus Christ.


© 2006, Devin McLachlan.