



Maundy Thursday: Self-Giving

Prelude

Gethsemane Prayer

Welcome—Our service tonight follows Jesus during some of his final moments, as we open our eyes to the scenes that unfolded that first Holy Week. Tonight, we approach these sacred stories with open eyes, open ears, and open hearts, ready to receive anew the Good News of God’s redeeming love in Christ. You can see in our chancel the different scenes where God was at work—in the temple as Jesus overturned tables, in the upper room as Jesus washed the disciples feet, at the table as he broke bread with them, and in the garden as Jesus shared his last message with his disciples. We’ll conclude our journey beneath the cross, as we witness with awe, how far God’s love would go that we might know life.

We begin with a song that is a prayer, one that we’ve been singing all of Lent.

Hymn

Open My Eyes, That I May See, 480

Prayer of Transformation—Holy and Awesome God, throughout this Lenten season, we have been left awe-struck by the wonder of your love. All around us you have revealed to us the beauty and delight that life can hold, if only we take time to notice. Open us now, once again, to the light of your love as we enter deeper into the life-giving stories of Holy Week. Help us find our place at your table that we might delight in the community of faith you’ve called us to and that we might find deeper connection to the one we call Savior and Friend.

The Lord’s Prayer (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

The Scene of Overturned Tables: Meaning

Pastor: Jesus was intentional about everything he did. He showed us the true meaning of life as he taught with his words and actions. After his dramatic entrance into Jerusalem, he moved back and forth that week between staying in Bethany for the night and coming back in to the Temple grounds to teach the growing crowds there for Passover and answer the questions of the religious authorities who were

scheming to catch him saying something controversial... controversial enough to call for his death. With every word, with every answer, Jesus confounded, frustrated, and angered them. But he called out the truth about the meaning of this moment in time, the injustices of the situation, and the desires of a loving God, parent of all, who desires the wellbeing of all, especially the vulnerable among us.

Debi: We arrive now at a significant scene that happened during that week. We can imagine Jesus in the vast Temple complex observing things he had likely seen before. But this time was different, knowing he had nothing to lose. This was the moment to act, to draw attention to the inequities perpetrated there.

Debi: Filled with thousands of pilgrims, this was a place of money-changing from one currency to another so that pilgrims to Jerusalem could pay a Temple tax. It was also a place of money-lending where the wealthy would lend money to the poor, with interest, so they would not lose their land and their livelihood. Vendors in the Temple market were also taking advantage of the pilgrims, especially those most in need of prayers and healing by selling goods required for sacrifice at exorbitant prices. It was an economic system designed to advantage the wealthy and the elite.

Pastor: Jesus' action of overturning some tables no doubt gathered a crowd and his condemning words added meaning to his mission as he confronted the situation, calling what is supposed to be a house of prayer a "den of thieves." His message was tangible and straightforward—no parables or metaphors here. There is injustice in this world... and even within his faith tradition. And he followed this up by healing those who came to him seeking wholeness—without need for money for sacrifices—simply because God's healing is more precious than gold and God's people are beloved. The Psalmist reminds us that God loves justice and the meaning this brings to our lives evokes awe in Psalm 19:

Debi: *Holding you in awe, YHWH, is purifying; it endures.
Your decrees are steadfast, and all of them just.
They are more precious than gold,
than the purest of gold,
and sweeter than honey,
than honey fresh from the comb.
In them your faithful people find instruction;
there is great reward in keeping them.*

Pastor: Especially when we witness injustice, we are called to question as Jesus did: “what is the meaning of this?” What deplorable situations have your attention in this moment of our time? What is our equivalent to overturning tables? What can we do to bring healing and wholeness in our corner of the world and for the most vulnerable among us?

Hymn

Open the Eyes of My Heart, 656

The Scene of the Servanthood and Washing Feet: Curiosity

Pastor: Jesus has asked that an upper room banquet space be arranged for the disciples. This common practice of gathering for a formal meal at significant times is familiar to us as it was for them. But this night would prove to be the most memorable of gatherings, handed down to us even now.

Vivian: A ritual that has not survived the ages at the beginning of a meal is that of washing feet. In a time of sandals and walking dusty roads, this was practical. But the ritual surrounding it was a show of respect as those with higher honor or prestige would have their feet washed by those of lesser esteem. And Jesus turned things on their head once more. He himself, the guest of honor, the beloved Teacher, and certainly the one with the spotlight upon him, prepared himself to wash the feet of his friends. Peter, aghast, questioned this outrageous action. The subject of who was the greatest and how respect and honor is orchestrated, shown, and given, was the topic of hot debate. And through it all, Jesus invites them to consider a new paradigm of love and relationship.

Vivian: Indeed, this is his “last chance” to convince them that there is another way than what society has prescribed as who is better, who is worthy, who is to be honored. He turns hierarchy into a level playing field by washing the feet of his disciples. This invites curiosity and an expanding of how they understand the very world they live in.

Pastor: We come to this story in awe as the disciples themselves were moved to awe. This is what awe does. It shifts our perspective and make us more curious about the treasures of a life well-lived, well-loved, with well-being. The Hebrew poet in Proverbs 2 reminds us again to...

Vivian: *Incline your ear to Wisdom,*

*and take her truth into your heart.
For if you yearn for insight
and cry out for understanding,
if you search for it as you would for silver,
and dig for it as you would for buried treasure,
you will understand what [awe] of YHWH is,
and discover how to truly know God.*

Pastor: Jesus was telling his disciples, and us, that to truly know God is to love as God loves. His message that night that he hoped would be passed on through generations is to love each other deeply and well without regard for status and how our loving will gain us favor or make us look good. The point is to love so that the exchange is more about how others feel, not how we look.

Pastor: To be curious is to be humble and admit that not only do we not know everything, but we are not better than anyone. There is no more humbling act than the exchange of love.

Pastor: In a profoundly awe-inspiring way, Jesus humbled himself in order to serve his friends, his disciples, us. In what ways might your life reflect this kind of love in action that Jesus shared?

Hymn

Will You Let Me Be Your Servant, 391

The Scene of the Meal: Delight

Pastor: As we remember the meal that had the disciples gathered in that upper room that night, we remember the meals that have meant so much to us over the years. There are no doubt “unforgettable” times that live in our memories. The delight we feel at the gathering of friends and loved ones is one of the most basic human experiences. Psalm 36 describes God’s love as the presence of a “feast of bounty” and drinking from “streams of delight.” Hear these words again:

*Debi: How precious is your love!
Whether creatures of heaven or children of earth,
we all find refuge in the shadow of your wings.
We feast on the bounty of your estate,
and drink from the stream of your delights.
In you is the wellspring of Life,*

and in your light we become enlightened.

COMMUNION

Invitation—On the table that night in the upper room where the basics of every meal, bread and wine. In typical Jesus style, he used these common elements to speak of God’s kin-dom of love and light that would shine through his body broken and his love poured out for them very, very soon. He invited them to remember that moment whenever they gathered around tables after he had gone. Just as we retell stories around the table of loved ones now gone and the things they said, Jesus was leaving them a memory, a moment, that could last for eternity. And so we remember together tonight as we gather at Christ’s table.

Choir

In This Moment of Remembrance

A Prayer for Transformation—God, you have called us to a life of faith, one that reflects and reveals the life-giving love we know in Jesus Christ, yet too often we fail to let your love shine through us. Break open our hearts in these moments, that the beauty and wonder of your grace might enliven us, that our judgement and our fear might give way to curiosity and delight, that our connection to our Savior might be made new as we accept his self-giving sacrifice that we might know the fullness, the awesomeness, of life.

Assurance of Grace—When Jesus gathered with his friends in his final moments, he declared this truth: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus calls you and claims you as friend. In Christ you are forgiven. In Christ you are loved.

Words of Institution—On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: “Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of your wonder-filled acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in self-giving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s

offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Blessing—Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, so that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit seal our connection with Christ, our connection with each other, and our connection to all the world through our ministry, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

We Share the Bread and the Cup

We Give Thanks—Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ's body and blood that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

The Scene In the Garden: Connection

Pastor: John's gospel is unique in the long passages of Jesus' last words to the disciples after the meal and before they leave to go to the garden. At one point, Jesus' says, "let's get up and go" and yet he continues with more lessons and last words to them before they actually do that.

Pastor: Throughout this pouring out of what-has-yet-to-be-said, he speaks of unity and connection. This is the most important thing at this moment. He says he is one with God, and he is one with them, the beloveds gathered at the table. And he says that this is true of each one of us. We are one with God, we are one with Jesus, and we are one with one another. Disconnection is an illusion. All of this is already true. We must simply open to believing this truth.

Pastor: For just a moment, imagine what your last message to your loved ones would be. What feels so important to you that you hope will outlive you? Perhaps it is something someone in your life imparted to you before they passed. Whether from you or from something you heard, what would you have said in Jesus' situation?

Pastor: Furthermore, Jesus says that he will not leave them orphaned and alone but that the Spirit will come and inhabit all people, just as the prophet Joel described. It will not distinguish between gender, status, age, or any other marker of difference. The Hebrew poet in Psalm 149 tells of this new song of connection, God's love offered to all, especially crowning the lowly with wholeness:

***Vivian:** Sing to YHWH a new song!
Sing praise in the assembly of the faithful.
Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their God.
Let them praise God's Name with festive dance;
let them sing praise with timbrel and harp.
For YHWH loves the people,
and crowns the lowly with salvation.*

Pastor: Jesus whole life has been a narrative of this equality of love so that "all may be one." And this will not end when he is gone, he says. And the time is near. In the course of the dinner, Jesus has acknowledged that he knows what Judas will do to hand him over to the authorities. And so he leads his disciples to the place where the events of the next three days will be set into motion.

Hymn *What Wondrous Love Is This*, 257, with Kaylee Gephart on cello

The Scene Beneath the Cross: A Blessing

The story continues as we head nearer the cross. You're invited to join us back here tomorrow evening at 7 pm for our Good Friday service as we hear the story of Jesus' final moments.

May the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of Awe, the Holy One-in-Three, be with you now and throughout your days, Amen.

Postlude

Looking Toward Jerusalem