

Maundy Thursday Year B; 1 April 2021

St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

By Zoom

Patricia Kay Jue, lay preacher

We retell our stories because they remind us of who we are and who G-d is

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Every year, we are called to gather together, on this night, on Maundy Thursday.

We hear of Moses and Aaron on the night of the Passover. We hear the Apostle Paul: of the night in which Jesus took the bread and wine. We hear the disciple John: of what happened on the night that Jesus was betrayed, of Jesus washing the feet of Simon Peter and the rest of the disciples. Jesus even washed the feet of the one who would betray him. On this night, these three retellings, of blood placed on the lintel of doorways, of bread broken and the cup of wine shared, and feet being washed, are told and retold every single year.

Why do we revisit these reading every year, on this night? Maybe it because these stories are to remind us of who we are.

And this makes me think about of stories about family.

One of my acquaintances talks about his family who in some distant past came by ship across the seas from Scotland. They settled on the East Coast. Then upon hearing of land being parceled out by George Washington, they moved into the Mohawk Valley. By twists of fate, he is part of the Mud Turtle Clan of the Onyota'a:ká—the People of the Upright Stone of the Oneida Nation—and of the Clan MacDonald of the Hebrides. He tells these stories to his children so they understand why they gather for the Three Great Feather Dances at autumn, and why they dance at Highland Flings.

One of my work colleagues talks about how her Lebanese family moved to East Utica, into the Italian community, and how they all hung together, the Italians and the Lebanese, because they were immigrants. And she talks about the meat her father and uncles would store in big refrigerators. She is a Chanatry, an extended part of the family that owns Chanatry's Hometown Market in New Hartford, so her memories of her family's meat business is part of her understanding of what it means to be an Utican and a Chanatry, even though she and most of her generation are no longer in the food business.

Then there are my own family stories, of my Grandmother, the daughter of a Chinese merchant family, who played under banyan trees in Hawai'i, of how she along with everyone else who had been born in Hawai'i became a US citizens when Hawai'i became a state, and of how she lost her citizenship when she married because her husband, my Grandfather, was not a US citizen... and then of how she regained her US citizenship by going through the many years of the naturalization process.

I am certain each of you have family stories that get passed down.

Why do these stories get told and retold by family? Maybe because they are our history, personal, intimate. They tell us who we are. And we tell them to our children and grandchildren so they may understand something about who they are, and what it means to be family, and a part of these United States.

So then, it is with these Scripture readings that we hear each year on Maundy Thursday. They are the signposts what it means to be a People of G-d, and for us, what it means, as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry puts it, to be a part of the Jesus Movement, the Beloved Community.¹

The reading from Exodus is about eating lamb, sharing Passover meal, and remembering. Moses says to the people: Tell this story to your children, and your children's children, down through all the generation. Because this story is the essence of who you are, and of your relationship with G-d. The LORD, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Great I AM, is the one who lifts you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of enslavement, freed from sorrow and oppression, to be G-d's people.

And so it has been, and continues to be... our Jewish brothers and sisters observe Passover. Passover - the unleavened bread, the roasted lamb, the cups of wine, and the final phrase "Next year in Jerusalem."² Even in the darkest times, in the concentration camps of World War II, observant Jews found a way to remember the Passover, even if only with the smallest piece of potato to serve as unleavened bread, and water as the stand in for wine. Because the Exodus story is about G-d's promise of justice and liberation.

So too, on Maundy Thursday, we Christians, remember that this is the night of the first Holy Communion. Because as the followers of Jesus, the Christ, we are held together by the blessing and breaking of bread, the body of Christ, broke for us, and the sharing of the wine, the cup of Salvation. Yes, even during these long pandemic days, when we are unable to physically gather together to eat this bread, drink this wine...we remember, and know that this is a part of who we are as Christians—looking forward to when we can once again celebrate Eucharist, the Great Thanksgiving... yes, even if virtually, by Zoom.

¹ "Be the Jesus Movement: Practice the Way of Love" <https://cnyepiscopal.org/2018/07/be-jesus-movement-practice-way-love/>

² L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalaymin —לשנה הבאה בירושלים—

And we remember, on this night, our Lord knelt on the ground, G-d humbled G-d's self, to wash the disciples' feet, to wash our feet. Because to love one another, to be disciples, is about pouring out oneself, being all in.

The Passover lamb, the Eucharist bread and wine. Reminders of the horrific - of the Exodus death of the first born, of the road to Golgotha and the cross, and maybe this year, of a global pandemic. But these are also the beginnings of something new, a people liberated from oppression, a people who will follow a risen Christ. Remember, tell and re-tell these stories, and in the retelling, relive them. Because they remind us of who we are, and who G-d is.

On this night, Jesus made a new mandate: not that we love our neighbours as ourselves, to love one another JUST as Jesus loves us. "A whole, different kind of love, an active love, one that is not self-serving, or biased, or conditional, or finite," rather a love that is completely embodied.³ G-d—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer—on this night, body broken, for us, poured out in love

³ These words are taken from **Maundy Thursday's Call to Love** April 1, 2021 By Allison Sandlin Liles found at <https://www.growchristians.org/2021/04/01/maundy-thursdays-call-to-love/>