

Maundy Thursday Sermon from John 13:1-17

“Standing on Holy Ground”

It is no secret that future things are hidden from our eyes, and we do not know the moment when we will die or how it will be. It is probably good that it is so, but our text tells us that the Lord was able to anticipate his sufferings by knowing all about them. “Jesus knew that his hour had come.” It was all appointed, and nothing will happen to any of us by accident, for there is an appointed hour for each one of us, and it will come in due season. Jesus knew that his hour had come, that he should depart out of the world to the Father. What a beautiful way of describing death, for Jesus was leaving one land for another, the one who died for our sins upon Calvary’s cross. For our Christian hearts, Jesus’ words should strengthen our faith as we should not fear the abiding love of Christ when it comes time to spread the sail, cross over the narrow sea, and come to the land of eternal heaven.

People often wish they could speak to the deceased just one more time, and yes, as pastors, we would also like to speak to the passing ones once more. When we have that opportunity, we speak of eternal and sacred things. Jesus knew his death was near and where he was going, but he did not think of death as final, only to think of the eternal. He was only departing from this world to a better world. We know death is near to all of us, and our “days are as grass,” for we begin to die the minute we are born, and yet, we do not know the exact day or hour and when that moment does come, the summons often comes abruptly.

Reflecting on my years in ministry, the conversations that I have been invited into are some of those who are about to die. Sometimes, I am asked to a hospital bedside, to a hospice bed, or maybe a bedroom. The conversation may take place around a kitchen table. While the places may vary, I am virtually always aware of the fact that I am standing on Holy Ground and that the conversations I am invited into are when things get real. Any sense of pretending is gone, and it is in those times when people speak of the most thoughtful things. Perhaps a reflection on their life or expressions of regret that they had spent more time with those they love. Love.

In those conversations, I am often told to tell a congregation, a spouse, children, or friends after they are gone how much that person loved them. They speak of the things eternal, the things in conversation with God. The lasting and enduring things that give life on this earth matter and give meaning. Sacred and Holy Ground in sacred and Holy conversations.

Tonight, as we gather as a community of faith, we are also invited into Holy Ground and sacred conversation. Jesus had this conversation with his disciples about his soon-to-be crucifixion, knowing full well that one of them would betray him. That one of them would deny him, not once, not twice, but three times, knowing that most all of them, when he makes his way to Calvary and the Cross, would desert him. Jesus knows these things. As we come here tonight, we reflect on Jesus’ last night, his last meal, his final conversations with his disciples, and tonight, with you and me.

Jesus speaks of the things he wants them to remember when he is no longer physically present with them. What does Jesus do? He speaks of love. He gives them a new commandment: “To

love one another just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.” In John’s gospel, this is known as Jesus’ Farewell Discourse. This sermon goes on for five more chapters. Jesus tells his disciples what is going to happen. But he also tells them something more important even after he is gone. Jesus says, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world would not see me anymore, but you would see me. Because I live, you also will live.” Jesus says I will ask God to send my Spirit to abide in you, to encourage them of everything he has taught them. To counsel them, to empower them, and to be his disciples of love in a hurting world.

Tonight’s message falls on Holy Ground in “Sacred Conversation.” On the final night of the Passover. The final night of Jesus with his disciples. It is a message of love: We are called to the Holy and sacred opportunity to love one another as Christ loves us. Jesus gets on his hands and knees and washes his disciples’ feet. A job generally left for the lowest of servants in a household, and by getting down and washing each foot one by one, including Judas, the one who betrayed him, the one who would deny him, those who would hurt him, he says nothing is too low or small to humble. To express and abiding love. One for another. He models for us a self-sacrificial love that is powerful enough to transform lives. A love that says, come, oh, you weary saints, and hideaway in the love of Jesus.

God gives each one of us different gifts and things to do. Our response is to follow where God is calling us. Nothing is too small, lowly, or insignificant to express the love of God in Christ. Mother Teresa once said, “I am not sure exactly what heaven will be like, but I don’t know that when we die, and it comes time for God to judge us, he will not ask, How many good things have you done in your life, rather he will ask, how much love did you put into what you did.”

Perhaps the most gracious and genuinely heartbreaking moment showcasing the relationship He had with God the Father is when Jesus utters his first of seven statements from the cross, the ultimate symbol of love and sacrifice. “Then, said Jesus, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” On this night, we are standing on the Holy Ground and being invited into a holy and sacred conversation and an invitation to live our lives, modeling that of the one who sacrificed everything out of love.

At the end of the Farewell meal, Jesus prays to the Father that he stays with the disciples, that they will be one, and that their community will be known by its love. Jesus invites you and me on this holy night. To follow him. Knowing what that means, what will your answer be? Amen.