

Maundy Thursday Year A1

“A new commandment I give you that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

During this week...walking as it were towards Good Friday and Easter, hearing the familiar passages from John’s Gospel, and the references to God’s voice resounding in the impending darkness (you remember some of the following crowds thought they heard thunder....voice and thunder the same word in the Greek)... these passages all week leading up to the Passion reminded me again to think of this passion narrative, this cruel descent into the abyss.... as yet another creation story....as most of the gospel lore are stories of creation....the story of the enduring of Chaos and darkness...and then the beginning of a new order....the cycle of reality, no less...Indeed the whole of scripture is a speculation as to the world’s remaking, the world’s renewal...a vision for a renewed world within which we might hope for new life, freedom and dignity for all.

And if a creation story, then it is a love story as well....because in the very beginning in an utter outpouring of God’s imagination, an utter outpouring of the whole of God’s self in a cosmic predisposition of sacrifice, God created the heavens and the earth....Not intelligent design per se, but a profligate love story beyond all reckoning... A sacrificial cosmic outpouring of mystery and beauty, the consummate outward and visible sign of love...a big bang of pure love.

In our Gospel reading appointed for this night, we are being told a love story....a love story whose words set loose over the sweep of creation orders all ways and all things....Jesus the model, and those who follow Jesus the model for the rest of us to see what love looks like in the here and the now... no sentimental platitude this....but love that is real...love that is alive... and love that changes things...reorders things into the way God imagines things to be....love that transforms our world....from the inside out... and it doesn’t come without pain.

Jesus commands his disciples... and disciples down through the ages, to love one another plain and simple...and in case they, or we don’t get it, he gives us a simple but radical example of what love is: Love, a complete submission to the good of the other....the washing of feet the cardinal metaphor....washing feet the outward and visible sign that says to be human we attend in intimate and tactile ways to the needs, and to the honor and to the well being...and to the dignity of our sister and our brother....

This is a description of divine Love.... But love that is not aloof in the heavens...but love that lives and breaths and restores and touches...touches us in this world...and we are told that it is we, we the heirs of bearing this love... It is we like the Christ...It is we who go into the world in utter sacrifice washing the feet of all....all who have been sullied by the rocky and dusty road of indignity and dispossession...It's not clean business, pilgrims...this business we are in...this business of washing feet....but it is what we are made for.

There's an irony concerning this Gospel, at least interesting to me...It is that this Gospel almost didn't make it into the official New Testament Canon, because it was deemed by many church fathers as docetic...docetic meaning privileging Jesus' divinity over Jesus' humanity....You remember in early church history the fights among theologians in the church councils seeking to strike a balance between Jesus' full humanity and his full divinity...but in this peculiar and compelling Gospel, these scribes (there were many hands compiling this gospel) these writers conflate...join together brotherly love, human love with divine love...the two are one conjoined in earth....eternally begotten as one...one love that is manifest in each and every act of sacrifice....sacrifice the way of eternal life...sacrifice that renders beautiful the ways of humankind and the very ways of earth... One love from the one source, from the one song....God's song of sacrifice that reveals who God is as divine and who we are as human.

Dear people of God, know this....that in spite of the powers of violence and shame and injustice, powers that surely abound in our world... the very powers that lynched Jesus of Galilee....the powers that still crucify the rejected of our world...know that in every act of sacrifice...no matter how small...no matter how mundane...no matter how seemingly insignificant...in every act of bending to the sacred feet of our neighbor...in every act of loving community... in every act of bearing dignity to the hurt of our world...there...right there, the remaking of our world begins...right there the spirit moves again over the deep, ordering the world the way God intends it...sloppy and messy work to be sure...and sometimes dangerous.... but this is sacred work...sacred work against which the powers and principalities, the shaming violence and greed of our world shall not prevail... this is our work, the work of the Baptized...Work that is engendered, nurtured and exponentially increased in the community of faith....This work will prevail. This work begins again and again the remaking of our world into the very commonweal of God....In each and every artful gesture of love, God's vision of salvation is made manifest.

And there's another thing....I had the privilege of leading the washing of feet ceremony in the L'Arche Community today....and I learned also that this rite of washing feet teaches us that we are all equals...no matter our station, our color, our ability...we are all servants of the one God...all made in God's Image.....all our own, and we theirs.

We are told in John's gospel that our brother Jesus loved his own until the end... and that's our call no less...no less than the one we say is fully human and fully divine... Our work is life-long...we are to love to the end, love as equals...offering our bodies and blood for the world's nurture....with love that raises the dead of our world...let us in our very lives...as the royal priesthood of God...the co-creators in our own day and time....let us, made in God's image, made in an utter predisposition of sacrifice...let us go into our world, and especially into the rejected corners, the periphery of our vision, the rocky and dusty climes of human existence wherein there is hunger and thirst, wherein tired feet ache and bleed...Let us wash their sacred feet.... and love our own....love them as God loves..... Love them to the end.