

Maundy Thursday  
April 21, 2011  
Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose  
Exodus 12:1-14a  
Psalm 116:1, 10-17  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

We often say that the Christian life is counter cultural; and that it is difficult. We say that it requires taking on a willingness for some kind of radical transformation to happen. But what does that look like? Tonight we get down to the details in what this transformation is that Jesus was teaching.

On this night Jesus met with his friends to celebrate the traditional Jewish Passover meal together. But Jesus had a lot more planned than just that shared religious feast. He had already predicted three different times that the time was near for him to be killed in Jerusalem, and that on the third day he would rise again. He knew tonight would be the last meal he would share with them, and so what he would say and teach tonight had to wrap up what he needed to teach them. This was a whole different level than his original invitation to those fishermen, when he simply said, 'Follow me'.

At this meal he would identify the traitor who would turn him into the Roman and Jewish authorities. He would wash the feet of his friends (even the feet of Judas!), to emphatically make the point that the kind of servanthood he has been demonstrating for three years applies even to the people who might not be our friends. We could call this kind of servanthood 'radical agape'; radical self-giving love. Jesus showed his willingness to give up any claim to his divinity, taking on the very menial task of washing the feet of his students. I do not recall any high school teacher, or college professor, or engineering manager, who showed a willingness to give up something for me, much less to wash my feet. But in our faith life, we do meet people who take their annual vacation to go on mission trips to serve people recovering from a hurricane, or from an earthquake. We find people who call us just to check in and ask how we are doing. We find people who donate their weekends to take donated clothes to shelters, cook meals, serve on Cursillo teams, offer their time and talent to provide a preschool education for children in our neighborhood, and on and on. A healthy church is most definitely a place where we learn, and then pass on to the next generation and to new believers, the concept of radical agape.

This night is named Maundy Thursday, from the Latin, *mandatum novum*, meaning 'new commandment'. Tonight Jesus told his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." So all of his proof of being the Son of God; his power to heal the sick, to comfort the suffering, and to be an advocate for the powerless, were not done just to demonstrate his divinity. These things were done to model how we should act. He was teaching us what radical agape looks like; what it

feels like when we receive it; and what it feels like when we do it. Think about a time you have been the recipient of radical agape; or have been able to give it away.

In the events we recall this Maundy Thursday in Holy Week, we see how very much Christ loved his disciples; and how much he loves his church. We see the institution of a new covenant with God, not based on the blood of sacrificed goats on an altar, but based on the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. On this night Jesus instituted the Mass as a remembrance of this new covenantal relationship with God, based on what Jesus was about to do. You and I get to live out that new relationship with God every day. It only takes our deliberate invitation every day; for God to be present and active in our day. It is a deeply meaningful, rewarding, and enduring spiritual high, to create this environment around us, filled with radical self-giving.

On Maundy Thursday we are reminded of the transformative power of what Christ has modeled for us. And we are reminded of the offering he made this night of his very life to God, empowered from his unlimited love for us. May God empower you and me to become models of transformative radical agape in our church, home, work, and in all our relationships. May you have a blessed journey from now to Easter morning. Amen.