

Maundy Thursday Service, St. Andrew's United Church
Thursday April 9, 2020

Prelude: MV 18 Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary Thompson

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true:
with thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

Good evening and welcome to this Maundy Thursday service at St. Andrew's United Church in Sudbury.

My name is Catherine Somerville and I am part of the ministry team here at St. Andrew's. I am the Minister of Pastoral Care and Outreach. I offer thanks to my colleague, Dr. Robert Hall. Bob, thank you, in advance, for your ministry tonight, and thank you for helping to pull the technical pieces of this service together.

As you can see, I am sitting here alone in our sanctuary. When I am finished taping my piece, I will leave and Bob will come in to offer some music. Then with the wonder of technology, it will all be put together and sent to you.

It feels strange to be here, alone tonight, without my community. Usually, we gather for this service outside the doors, in the Narthex area, greeting our friends with hugs and handshakes and a few instructions. We open the doors and are invited to follow a path of tea lights into a circle of chairs, where we sit close to one another, listen to sacred scripture, share a time of prayer, and then partake of communion.

This year is different, and this offering will be a short service. But we intend for it to help you find your footing as together, we make the journey through the anguish of Good Friday, through the waiting time known as Holy Saturday, until we gather virtually, to shout our Alleluias on Resurrection Day.

In an email one of you sent to me this week, you said that the journey feels very long right now. On Maundy Thursday, I always feel that way. The journey feels as if it will be very long. But I take consolation from knowing that I am not alone. You are traveling with me. We are following stars through the dark night, looking for signs, seeking our way together. We are making our journey to the heart of God. We are not alone.

Opening Prayer: God, tonight, more than almost any night, we know that we are part of a community of love. We may not be seated in the same circle this year; we are not at the same table, but we are a community for one another. This night, we give thanks that we are held in each other's hearts, that we are important to one another. We hear your invitation to make this journey with patience and trust and care. In this community of love, we know that our presence is felt at a distance, that our voices matter to the song, and that our prayers are lifted as one. God, hear our prayers this holy night. Amen.

The word Maundy comes from the Latin Mandatum; it means a command. After Jesus had a last meal with his disciples, just like you see in this depiction in the carving on our communion table, he looked around the circle and as he gazed upon his disciples, he realized that words would not be enough. He needed to show them what divine love, the love of God, looked like in a human form.

Here is the story: I am reading portions of John, chapter 13, verses 1-35:

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served.... He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel.... He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?".... Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

When he had finished washing their feet, he returned to his place. "Now that I have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.... My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: where I am going, you cannot come. A new commandment I give

you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”

On that last night, Jesus commanded his disciples to do two things: wash feet and love. Through the years, we have moved away from the practice of foot washing. We often take turns at a Maundy Thursday service, and wash each other's hands. Our hands get dirty, more than our feet encased in shoes and socks, but as we all have heard so often these last weeks, our hands can carry diseases that might make us sick. We are being told to wash our hands in order to stop the spread of disease.

Tonight, when Bob's music is finished, I invite you to go to the bathroom, the kitchen sink and wash your hands. But instead of performing this action from the place of fear, to do it from the dwelling place of love that exists in your soul. Go slow. Caress your hands. Rub them together. And then say to yourself, “God has this. God has me. I am loved by God.”

As we make ready for what awaits us, as we continue the journey towards resurrection, and preparing for what might come in our lives, hold fast to the truths of this night. Remember that you are loved. Remember that we are being held. Remember that we are not alone. God has this.

One of the loveliest prayers I know comes from the Anglican tradition, from their book of Alternative Services. Would you pray with me?....

Lord, it is night. The night is for stillness. Let us be still in your presence.

It is night after a long day. What has been done, has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.

The night is dark. Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives, rest in you.

The night is quiet. Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn. Let us look to the new day, waiting for joy, for possibilities. In Jesus' name, we make our prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

The journey feels very long right now. But God will give us grace, to bear bravely the changes we must undergo, the pain we may have to face, the uncertainty we live in now.

God gives us the courage to believe that hope will dawn in our world again.

We pray for deep peace, to all the members and friends our church family this night.

Postlude: VU 612 There is a Balm in Gilead

Balm in Gilead

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus and say, "He died for all."

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sources Used: Ideas and worship theme adapted from Shining Waters Regional Council worship resource prepared by Jeffrey Dale, and released for use on March 31, 2020; final prayer taken from Celebrate God's Presence, page 554 (29T012), New Zealand Prayer Book.

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