

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC

March 24, 2016

“To Know and Be Known as Disciples”

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”

John 13:35

Prelude

This night has a significance exceeded by
few others in our Christian lives. We worship
remembering what is often called,
 “The Last Supper,”
a meal shared by Jesus with his followers in an
 “upper room.”

There is a gospel divide on
 the exact date of the meal.
Matthew, Mark, and Luke
are on the same page,
asserting Jesus was observing Passover
 with his disciples.
John’s gospel differs, with the meal set
the day before, prior to the Passover celebration.
This discrepancy may seem slight,
but it leads to different accents
the gospel writers want to impress upon us.

Gerard Sloyan, who has written on the history
and development of Christian thought,
has stated: “... **the Gospel narratives seem to have
conflicting recollections. They meant to
write a theologically interpreted history of the
events and ended by writing what has (been)
taken for literal history, a history all but impossible
to reconstruct with precision ...**” (*The Crucifixion
of Jesus*, p. 44).

And so it is with this “this night”,
a vital time on Holy Week, which
recalls events difficult to reconstruct
 with precision.”

According to the Mark, Jesus had secured a spot, made reservations, for the meal. The disciples had posed the question: **“Where do you want us to go and make preparations ... to eat the Passover?”** Jesus responded by sending two from among the twelve into the city (presumably Jerusalem), **“Go ... and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room that I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready”** (Mark 14:13-15). The KJV is much in our minds: where it references **“a large upper room.”**

The upper room.
It is really an important classroom,
with the Teacher still teaching,
imparting lessons, offering instruction,
with precision, mind you,
for the disciples to grasp.

There is an air of
uncertainty and tension
within the classroom,
a sense of urgency for Jesus
to cut quick to the heart of what
he hopes to convey to the company
he has assembled.

Outside - oppositional forces are on the rise.
The Jesus movement is a threat - and those
threatened - the ruling elites - are not prepared
to concede their place or their power.
So time is of the essence -
and the time spent in upper room
is seized by Jesus to address what is
most essential in understanding his life.

***** ***** *****

During the weeks of Lent leading to this Holy Week,
my Lenten study class worked with Rowan Williams’

book, *Being Christian*. He posed a simple question: **What are the essential elements of the Christian life?** He sought not to delve into extraordinary elements that contribute to wonderful and distinguished lives, but of what he called: **“those simple and recognizable things that make you realize that you are part of a Christian community.”**

Williams focused upon Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, and Prayer in his book. He commented: **“There is a huge and bewildering variety in Christian thinking and practice about all kinds of things, but these four ... have remained constant and indispensable for the majority of those who call themselves Christians.”**

This evening, I want to suggest that Maundy Thursday offers us a condensed guide for determining what is essential for our walk with Jesus.

- (1) We see the **generosity of Jesus**, knowing he was teaching among the one to betray him, and others who would take flight and desert him. Jesus took the bread, blessed the bread, shared and blessed the cup with imperfect followers.

R. Williams: **“The Eucharist is not...a reward for good behavior; it is the food we need to prevent ourselves from starving (upon) our own self-enclosure and self-absorption, our pride and our forgetfulness”** (p. 53).

- (2) We see the resolve of Jesus to face off against opposition from those who supposedly knew him best and loved him most.

This happens when Peter disputes the intention of Jesus to stoop and wash feet; Peter, who recoiled at the thought of Jesus serving rather than being served.

This act, bending, washing, subverted the social positions of the day, it upended the cultural perspective that reigned then, that reigns now. How wonderfully we have seen Pope Francis breaking tradition,

washing the feet of women, the incarcerated,
Muslims who have given consent.

And how stinging Jesus' rebuke of Peter:
**"If you can't see and do this, if you can't
accept this, you have no part of me"** (John 13:8).

(3) We are drawn into life defined by the new
commandment.

The golden rule has universal merit: **"Do unto
others as you would have others do unto you."**
Jesus has left us more than the golden rule. Yet Jesus
takes us here and beyond. He bequeaths a love
he expected us to share with others.
**"As I have loved you,
you also should love one another"**
(John 13:34).

This is the clue, the key to knowing and being
known, as disciples. As such, it is an essential
component of our being Christian.

Jesus is always our Rabbi, our Teacher,
the Master Clinician of our souls,
who expects us to follow where his love is needed.

The legacy of the Teacher, though,
is not the teaching -
as important as that may be, especially this evening
when we delve into essentials.

The legacy of the Teacher is not the teaching;
we are not content with mastery of chapter and verse,
proper enumeration and recollection of the ten (commandments),
our knowledge of the greatest of these (I Corinthians 13:13).

The legacy of Jesus, our graduation exercise
out of the upper room class, is what Herman Waetjen called:
**"an empowered new people of God ...
divinely willed to continue ... the work of drawing
all human beings into a new era of salvation ..."**
This is a good summary of our enterprise as a church:

to empower people to love as Jesus loves.

The new era of salvation was commenced by Jesus,
and it will be consummated by Jesus. And we speed
that pending day of glory
when we consent to participate in it,
when we demonstrate,
when we do, as once was done;
when we know and are known as disciples.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
ad may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*