

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
March 29, 2018 Maundy Thursday
Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Let us pray. Grant us, O God, to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will through Christ our Lord. Amen

My grandparents were born in the very early 1900's, too young to serve in WWI and just beyond the recruitment age for WWII. They lived at a time when the art of telling a good story was a way of life. As a kid I remember sitting around the table after our evening supper and hearing story after story that took place way back when on their family farms in North Dakota.

In these stories I learned how my great-grandfather was often the first to get the newest farm equipment and that the other farmers would follow, figuring that if it was good enough for Nels Severson, it was good enough for them. They were the first to have a telephone. And when my mother was a little girl, Grandpa Nels would let her comb his hair AND put curlers in it while he took his nap on the davenport after the noon dinner and before going back out into the fields.

I never knew my Great-Grandpa Nels, but through these stories, told year after year as I grew up, I learned some things about him and Great-Grandma Gena, and my grandmother, and my mother. I learned what was important to them, how they related to one another, and the values they held dear. Even if none of those were stated outright, they were implied and understood.

We learn about the heritage of our faith through stories, too. Tonight we heard three stories that have been told and retold over the centuries. They are stories that show us what our God is like, and what God wants us to know and remember as his children.

The great thing about these stories is that they are meant to be retold with more than just words. There is an old saying attributed to Confucius that says: "I hear and I know; I see and I remember; I do and I understand."

If all we do is hear these stories, we will know the facts and the characters. But in each story God adds something we can see to help us remember. And even more, God's people are given something to do, so that we can understand and proclaim to others the truths these stories tell.

We began with the story of the Passover that took place on the last night the Israelites spent in Egypt as slaves. God commanded them to prepare a lamb to eat for their last meal and to paint the blood of the lamb on their doorways so that their homes would be passed over from the final deadly plague that God brought down on Egypt.

Year after year their descendants told the same story and made and ate the same meal as a way to know this powerful God, to remember what God had done for them, and to understand the truth of God's lasting covenant with them.

Next we heard Paul's instructions given to the church at Corinth. They were having a hard time living together. Basically, they weren't very good at sharing. Some ate a lavish meal in an inner room and left others to eat in a courtyard on simple food, with their servants possibly getting nothing at all.

Paul told the story of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, the same story we hear every time we participate in Holy Communion. He told it in a way that it could be retold and remembered, over and over again.

With these early Christians, we hear the story so that know what happened that night before Jesus went to the cross.

We see the common elements of bread and wine that help us remember Christ's body and blood that was given for our salvation.

And then we are given something to do. In the eating and drinking we understand that in Jesus God established a new covenant, one that fulfills the first covenant, and ushers in a new age of forgiveness and freedom for those who believe in him.

We moved from a yearly ritual meal of remembrance, to a regular meal of remembrance. And then, in our gospel reading, Jesus gave us one more ritual that encompasses much more than the washing of feet.

We hear in this story about a gathering of friends. We hear about Judas who would betray Jesus. We hear the objections of Peter and how Jesus lovingly corrects his misguided thinking. We hear this story and we know the heart of God in a new way.

In this story we see how Jesus loved by setting aside his position, kneeling down, and serving his brothers. In his serving, we remember the depth of his love for us. It is a kind of love that blurs and even erases the lines of status and power.

And in this story, we are given something to do. Jesus gives us a new commandment, one that encompasses all the other commandments and embodies that new covenant that he established in his blood. Our task is to love one another as Jesus loves us.

We may not wash one another's feet, but we are called to love with lives of service. Jesus commands us to live as a community in ways that show the world the heart of God. This is not a yearly ritual or a weekly ritual. This commandment is a way of life.

Remember, Jesus even washed Judas's feet. In living and loving as Jesus loved, we come to understand what it really means to be a disciple, a believer in Jesus Christ. By living and loving and serving as Jesus did, our lives give witness to the love of God to the world.

We do not follow this commandment of our own will and power. It is the Holy Spirit alive in and among us who moves us to lives of loving service.

In the hearing and the seeing and the doing of this Christian life, the Spirit of Christ is at work transforming us into servant leaders. And then we are no longer just remembering the events of the past with our minds. God is at work re-remembering us as a community of faith.

We are no longer individual members, but brought together, re-remembered, into one body who lives and serves the world with the heart of God in Jesus Christ as our center.

May our lives of service proclaim the love of God to all the world.

Thanks be to God! Amen