

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
April 1, 2021 Maundy Thursday
Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Today is the beginning of one continuous worship experience known from about the 4th Century as The Three Days in which we recall Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. Tonight, Maundy Thursday, focuses on the passion—the deep and abiding love that Jesus received from God and handed on to his disciples and the whole world. This love from Jesus will become the marker of the Christian community.

The washing of feet and the command to love one another takes place near the time of the Passover. In John's gospel it is the last supper Jesus shares with his friends. In the other gospels, the last supper takes place at the actual Passover meal. The Passover is the story we heard in our first reading. God's instructions for the meal before Moses led them out of Egypt, became a tradition that formed Israel as a people.

Now Jesus transforms that remembering of God's salvation in the past to remembering the salvation that is about to take place in his death and resurrection. This meal was handed down to the early Christians, like Paul and the church in Corinth, and has been handed down in every generation since to us.

Rituals and traditions are powerful ways to remember—or bring to mind—the people or events of the past. They are also powerful in their ability to re-member or bring together individual members into a unifying body.

I think about sports teams who have their rituals to start off their games, when the players huddle up, are given a pep talk by the coach, and then their hands reach into the center of their circle and a word or phrase is chanted. They have been unified by that ritual—all working together for a common purpose.

I think about the family rituals during various holidays. Candles on a cake and the singing of Happy Birthday; taking turns around the Thanksgiving dinner table to say what each person is thankful for that year; decorating the Christmas tree or opening gifts in a particular order—we all have rituals that recall holidays of the past and welcome in new people into our families.

Over these past weeks of Lent, we have been reflecting on the covenants God has made with creation, humanity, and Israel in particular. Even as God was forming Israel to reflect and project God's love and commitment to the world, God created ways to form them into a community, with God as their center.

In the ritual of Holy Communion, Christ is drawing us into community with one another. This community is formed to be a people of service and love for one another, which spills out into the larger world.

In the last couple of decades Holy Communion has moved from an occasional event to being included every Sunday. As congregations transitioned to weekly Communion some people argued that to do it more often would diminish the experience to something ordinary, and that can be true.

But as I think about our annual rituals for holidays and birthdays, we also develop our daily rituals that carry meaning even as we use them as often as every day.

A friend of mine gave his son a watch for his 16th birthday. (This was a long time ago when kids didn't rely on their phones for the time!) On the birthday the father said, "Always remember that I think about you all the time, and God watches over you." It's a little hokey play on words, but that's what makes it easy to remember.

In the following days and years that the son lived at home, whenever he left to go out with friends, the dad would ask, "Do you have your watch on?" It was his sideways way of saying again, "I think about you all the time, and God is watching over you."

Another couple I know went through a hard time in their marriage, and out of their time in counseling, they committed to greeting each other at the door each evening. Whoever was home first, stopped what they were doing and went to the door to greet the other spouse with a hug and a kiss.

We have other daily rituals at dinner time or bedtime, and this is what Jesus gives to us in the meal of Holy Communion. Eat—this is my body. Drink—this is my blood. When we taste these elements every single time, we are drawn back into community with Jesus, with God, and with the whole community of God's people.

Tonight, as we gather again to receive Christ, may the words that have become so familiar serve as the words that bind us to Christ and to one another. Tomorrow our worship will continue as we witness Jesus' death on the cross.

And we will carry with us the passionate love of Christ we have received here in the bread and the wine, his body and blood. May that passion so fill us and strengthen us that we would boldly love one another as Christ has loved us.

Thanks be to God. Amen