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Reflection for April 9



By Sue D'Alessio

Holy Thursday – Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples and Offers a New Commandment of Love

Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him....

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved, you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:5, 34-35)

Before the hours leading up to his trial and crucifixion, Jesus participated in a final meal with his disciples. In the book of John, the author tells the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples before the meal. In that time, when people came into a home after walking on dusty roads, a host would have servants offer hospitality for the guests to have their feet washed as relief from the long journey. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he acted as a servant rather than as the host. He was offering a caring gesture of service and care that was unexpected and surprising – unprecedented, lavish love. At the end of the story, Jesus invited those who were sharing in the meal with him to love one another as a sign of the love Jesus offered to them.

Today, while we don't usually offer guests a chance to wash their feet before sharing a meal together, we do offer guests a chance to wash their hands. Offering hand washing doesn't have quite the depth of hospitality as foot washing had, yet it is one of our ways of offering our guests care and a refreshing welcome. In this time, when we are practicing social distancing (Bob Ditters, from UM Camps, referred to this as "safe socializing"), it is a challenge for us to experience and give hospitality in the ways we are used to. How can we wash one another's feet via online worship? Finding new ways of offering hospitality is not easy. Yet, I hear story after story of ways congregations are offering hospitality – and acting in love – and how we are continually learning new ways of being present with one another in love and caring hospitality. People are volunteering in creative ways: delivering food to neighbors, to school children, to people in need; sewing face masks; staying safer-at-home in care for and consideration of others; writing cards and letters, emailing and making phone calls to stay connected; offering prayers, studies, devotionals, reflections and worship online; providing resources for families with children at home; publicly thanking doctors, nurses, teachers, food service workers, public service workers, mail carriers; and on and on. I pray in joy and gratitude for all these acts of love and hospitality being offered.

On this Holy (Maundy) Thursday and through the rest of this Holy Week, every time you wash your hands (and feet), take those twenty seconds to pray prayers of gratitude for the ways you have experienced holy, spirit-filled hospitality and Christ-centered love in your life. Then, in response to having received these gifts, find ways to offer gifts of love to others. As you walk the journey with Jesus from this Holy Thursday meal, through the trials and betrayals, through the death and burial into the empty tomb of new life. may you discover all the ways God is with you and with us all, in all the struggles of life. May you experience the grace and joy of the new life of resurrection in your hearts and lives.

God of Grace and Glory, Thank you for all the ways you are present with us. When we feel overwhelmed, help us to breathe in your healing Spirit. When grief and exhaustion fill us, help us to know that you walk this path with us. When we are surprised by joy, help us to allow that joy to fill us to overflowing. When we feel alone and distanced, help us to reach out to others who also may feel alone. Teach us new ways to learn, grow and serve as your Disciples, so that your great love will be known by the ways we love one another. We pray this prayer and the prayers of our hearts in the name of the one who walks with us on our journey of life, Jesus our Christ. Amen.