

I am absolutely overwhelmed by how much we love, care for, and serve our neighbors. I generally am filled with gratitude for all the ways I see people serving and loving one another, but in no bigger way do I see this service than during this time of pandemic. People are doing what they can in all kinds of ways to show support in love and prayer, service and action. Folks are offering to run errands for those who must be in quarantine and are at the highest risk of contracting the virus. Folks with incredible needlework and creative abilities are sewing masks like you wouldn't believe to protect people serving on the front lines. And ultimately, as challenging as it is at times, especially during this Holy Week, all of us staying at home are doing the best thing we can to love and serve our neighbors - by flattening the curve and reducing transmission of the virus in many ways. I am in awe of how well and thoroughly we have all joined in spirit but physically distanced to love and serve the community around us.

The one thing all these current acts of service have in common, in addition to being centered in our current covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, is that they are embodied. We have to do something tangible, in our bodies, with our bodies, created by the skills we have in our bodies, in order to serve one another.

When we began this Lenten season, we had a powerful, tangible reminder of our physical bodies, our physical lives, how fragile yet powerful they are, as we wore ashes on our foreheads, and remembered that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Admittedly, in that moment, we had no idea just exactly how powerful and true those words would ring by the time we got to Holy Week. How the vulnerability of our bodies and strength of our hearts would be at the forefront of a major life and world change. How the fragility of life would be on full display. How the dust of creation would incite both fear and gratitude. How the humble services we provide for one another could make an absolute world of difference..

Maundy Thursday is about service to one another, and it is about bodies. What better time than now to dwell in the stories and practices of embodied faith.

The two stories of Maundy Thursday that we encounter are the feet washing and the very first communion. We read the story of Jesus washing his disciples feet today. This radical action on Jesus' behalf was surprising to his disciples. Foot washing was a common act of hospitality, generally done by household servants, not the people hosting the meal itself. It was as natural a practice as offering to take someone's coat is now in our world, but of course, much more involved. Jesus washed his disciples' feet as an act of humility, an act of service, and ultimately an act of love that was remembered right alongside the last meal he shared with his beloved followers. Jesus humbled himself in service to those he loved so dearly.

The sacrament of communion, of course, is the breaking of bread and drinking of wine, two other common elements of a hospitable home. Sharing food and drink is one of the pillars of hospitality, and Jesus took it upon himself to serve these elements to the people around him. He embodied the promises of God, proclaiming the bread as his body and the wine as his blood, so that all people, including us, can experience the physical presence of Jesus in these elements. Jesus foretold his own death, in the midst of serving his friends, knowing the sacrifices he was about to make. Even in the midst of the hardest possible situation, knowing he was about to die, Jesus served the people around him. Jesus relied on the promises of God, that God will never leave us or stop loving us, ever. What profound faith is rooted in this very first communion.

Of the many gifts we have in Jesus Christ, His sacrifices, death, and resurrection, they are all because of who he tangibly was, as a human, in our physical world. While God is certainly at work in our life, in creation and the cosmos, in our neighborhoods and nature, God's work is often much more ethereal. Jesus' work was all embodied. Jesus walked and sailed, ate

and drank, taught and blessed, proclaimed and advocated, prophesied and lived. Jesus' human body, just like ours, was broken and given for the sake of all of us. Jesus' human blood, just like ours, was shed for the love and grace of all of us, that we may know God and God's love will never leave us. Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and in his humanity, connects deeply with us fellow humans, throughout all of time and place.

So as we move forward in our worship over these three Holy days, let's lean into serving one another in the ways we can. Let's spend time deeply feeling through what it is to sacrifice with our physical bodies for the well-being and love of our neighbors, our community. Let's remember Jesus' sacrifice, in the midst of betrayal, denial, and interrogation, that he gave his body for our sake. Let's remember that we need to nourish our bodies and our spirits, in word and deed, especially in this time of distancing and newness. And above all, let's remember our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice of his life out of deep love for us, so that we may have grace and love eternal, no matter what may come our way. Thanks be to God. Amen.