

Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020
Psalm 88 and John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Pastor Lauren Eanes

I want to begin at the end.

Well, not the *end* end, but the end of our service tonight. Even that isn't really the end, because the liturgy of the Three Days is really one liturgy. But we'll start with the end of the Maundy Thursday part of our liturgy this night.

If we were together in person, we'd hear Psalm 88 chanted as the altar was stripped, in preparation for Good Friday.

This psalm is a lament and a cry for help. In many ways, it's the most dark and desperate of all the psalms. The others all have at least some bit of praise or hint of hope.

But this one starts with a cry for help: O LORD, my God, my Savior, by day and night I cry to you.

It continues with a whole list of the things have gone wrong:

For I am full of trouble;
I have become like one who has no strength;
I am in prison and cannot get free.

And then it ends with this haunting line:

My friend and my neighbor you have put away from me,
and darkness is my only companion.

As we look out into the world, we find it all too easy to resonate with the words of this psalm. We are acquainted with the grief and fear and pain of the psalmist. Because, of course, our friends and neighbors have been put away from us, for a time at least, and it seems like the darkness is growing.

When we look out into the world, we see a world struggling to survive in the face of a virus that we have come to fear because it's changed so much about how we are trying to live. We see kids who can't go to school because the kids are closed. We see high school and college seniors forced to abandon their graduation celebrations. We see people out of work, businesses shuttered, employees abandoned. We fear for our own health or the health of our loved ones as we are painfully aware of the many people who are falling victim to COVID-19. Life during this pandemic can be disorienting, exhausting, overwhelming. It brings up anger and confusion. There seems to be so much darkness.

But as we peer into this darkness, we discover one small sliver of light that struggles to make its way into our hearts. It is the light of a man who kneels down to wash the feet of his disciples. He washes their feet in the midst of his own darkness. In the midst of betrayal and denial, in the midst of anger and confusion, he ties a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, and bends down in a loving act of service.

As Christ touches the darkness of his world, he teaches us how we might confront the darkness of our own world. Our response is not to be one of anger or despair. It can only be one of service. That is the

final lesson, the final command that Jesus gives to us. We give and receive love in humble service to each other.

And as we become centered not in the darkness but rather in the compelling need to take care of one another, we become the gift of Christ's presence for each other. We know that serving one another right now looks very different than it did just a few weeks ago. We know that denying the things that we want so desperately, namely, to be together in person, is a way that we do show love to each other. And yet, the way we use the resources we have can indeed become radical humble service—our telephones and computers to connect with those who sit in darkness, our generosity with the money we have to support organizations who are caring for those most vulnerable in our midst, our mask sewing and grocery shopping and child caring and most of all our praying—these are the ways God works through us and is present to us.

We know that Psalm 88 is not the end. For the lesson of this night is that the darkness will never conquer the light because we follow the example of he who is our Savior and our Lord. In Christ Jesus we learn each and every day to live out the love of God in the service that we render for each other. We find the strength to sit in the darkness tonight, because we follow the one who conquers darkness with love.