

Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Like many of you, like many people around the world, I was shocked on Monday by the pictures of the great cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris as it burned. I haven't ever been to Paris and so I've never seen it in person, but my wife and daughter both have been there and I know there were tears in their eyes. But as I watched film of the event on the news the next day, one of the stations had on the historian John Meacham and he was able to capture a bit of what I was feeling and thinking. He said that it was strange and perhaps providential that this happened during Holy Week. Because of all the commands of Christ, of all the things that we are enjoined to do in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the one that we are able to obey most often comes up predominantly this week, the command to remember. When we look at the roof of the great cathedral burning we are called on to remember. When the people of Paris gathered around the ashes and prayed and sang, they were remembering. But they were doing more than remembering what Notre Dame was like in the past. They were remembering what it meant to them today. The biblical call to remember is not just to bring to mind something that happened in previous years or to people long ago. It is a call to bring back to our consciousness that this event means something to our lives today.

When Moses commands the people to observe the festival of the Passover, it is a time of remembering. When Paul instructs the people of Corinth about the Lord's Supper he says it for remembering. When the people are commanded to do those things, it isn't just a remembrance of something that happened to people many years ago, it is something that we remember as happening to us. When we come up here

and take a piece of bread and dip it in the juice, we are supposed to remember that this means something to us. So I guess that's the question, what does this mean? What do we remember? I think we take some clues from the scriptures that we read tonight. Paul is telling the Corinthians to remember, but why does he tell them that? Paul gives very explicit instructions to the Corinthian church, so concise that we use the same words every time we celebrate this sacrament. He is specific about all of that because there was a problem in the Corinthian church. They were gathering for a meal each week, but those who were wealthy were taking advantage and arriving early and eating their fill before those who were poor could arrive and take part. The very thing that was supposed to unite the church was causing divisions. So Paul reminds them that this meal is actually about everyone taking part. It is about caring for the poor and the least among you. It is an example of how Jesus gave himself for us and how therefore we ought to do the same. The Lord's Supper is about remembering, and it is about remembering the poor. We don't talk about that very much, but perhaps we should. Sometimes we use the invitation to this table saying "it is the table of sharing with the poor of the world with whom Jesus identified himself." We remember that this table is open to all as a sign that as the church we are to be caring for the poor and welcoming the stranger, or else we are not really remembering.

Jesus also asks us to remember the command that he gave to his disciples on the night of his betrayal. After all this is Maundy Thursday. We don't always remember that the word "maundy" comes from the Latin word "mandatum" meaning "commandment." It is on Maundy Thursday that we are supposed to remember the commandment that Jesus gave us that night. He could have told them anything that night, but the last thing he left them with was the command to remember to love one another. When everything else falls away, that is what we are supposed to remember. More than all the theology, more than all the creeds and confessions, more than the Sermon on the Mount, more than the Lord's prayer, more than anything else, love one another. Can we remember that much? Can we do that for everyone? Even those we don't like? Even those who disappoint us? Even those who betray us? Jesus did.

Remember? When Jesus washes their feet, he washes all their feet. Even Judas. Even when he knows that this is the last meal he will have with them. The rest of them really don't know that. Judas does. He knows because he's the one who is going to betray Jesus, and no matter what happens, he will have no place among Jesus' followers any more. This is his last time. We don't really know much about Judas, and we certainly don't know why he did what he did, and maybe it doesn't matter. What matters is that this is almost the last time these friends will see each other. This meal that they share. The intimate washing of the feet. Jesus surprises them all by washing their feet, including Judas. If he knows who is going to betray him, he doesn't give it away and maybe it's important that he washes Judas's feet as well. But then he hands Judas a piece of bread and tells him to go and do quickly what he must. And so Judas goes out, and it's the last time he will be part of that group, but not the last time he will see Jesus, not quite. A few hours later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas comes back, soldiers at his side, ready to give them the signal to arrest the one he indicates. Ready to betray Jesus with a kiss. We don't really know what was in either of their minds, but now we do know it is something they will remember. Jesus stands and feels his friend's lips grace his cheek for an instant. On this last evening of his life he has eaten his last meal, and this is the last time that he will ever feel the touch of another human being except in torment. Is it the Son of God and his betrayer who meet here? Or two old friends embracing in a garden knowing that they will never see each other again. Maybe.

Yes, Judas betrays Jesus, but he is only the first in a long procession of betrayers two thousand years long. But maybe Jesus has it in his heart to forgive Judas, and I hope that's true. Because if that is true then I have hope that he can forgive me for all the times that I've betrayed him, disappointed him, saddened him, left him alone to pursue what I wanted.

According to one tradition, Judas regrets what he has done almost immediately, gives the money back and then goes out and hangs himself. Yet there is a tradition in the early church that his suicide was based not on despair but on hope. If God was just, then he knew there was no question where he

would be heading as soon as he'd breathed his last. Furthermore, if God was also merciful, he knew there was no question either that in a last-ditch effort to save the souls of the damned as God's son, Jesus would be down there too. Thus the way that Judas figured it, Hell might be the last chance he'd have of making it to heaven, so to get there as soon as possible, he tied the noose around his own neck. Who knows? In any case it is a scent to think about. Once again they met in the shadows, the two old friends, both of them a little worse for wear after all that had happened, only this time it was Jesus who was the one to give the kiss, and this time it wasn't the kiss of death that was given.¹

So maybe it wasn't the last time. Maybe in God's mercy and by God's grace, there aren't any last times. Maybe when we remember, we instead of rembering what used to be, we bring the past forward and something new can happen. Maybe the taste of this feast and the fellowship we share is only the beginning.

¹ Buechner, Frederick. *Peculiar Treasures*. p. 83.