

Sermon April 17 2025

Maundy Thursday

Redeemer

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Grace Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Blessed Holy Week to you

Carry the whole week with you at all times.

Not just the Easter part, but remember the whole, the Palm Sunday joy, the Maundy Thurs intimacy, the Good Friday devastation, and the Easter Resurrection

On Monday, Apl 14, a 5.2 magnitude earthquake struck Southern California, causing the elephants at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park to react. The three oldest elephants, Ndlula, Umngani, and Khosi, instinctually formed an “alert circle” around the two youngest, Zuli and Mkhaya.

An alert circle is a natural response to perceived threats. It is typical in the wild, but interesting how it came out in the responses of elephants who live in the zoo, and for whom there are never really any threats at all to deal with. Instinctual behavior is remarkable.

The elephants seemed to be uncertain, and in a state of hyper vigilance. Things are confusing. On the video, you can see them reaching out to each other with their trunks, checking on each other to see that they are ok.

It’s a situation not unlike what the disciples were experiencing during that week of Passover, after Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem by the crowds with joyous praise. Just as calamity is about to strike the group, Jesus gathers them about him. He uses the Passover meal as the opportunity to gather them and then turns that meal into a memorial meal for their moment.

We note that the disciples do not have a clear understanding about what is happening. They argue about the different meanings they hear in what Jesus says. They posture and quiz each other about who could ever betray Jesus. Peter even argues with Jesus about the appropriateness of his actions, as he goes to wash their feet.

But Jesus hasn't gathered them into an alert circle to defend against the enemy out there. He gathers them to feed them, teach them, refresh them, and then send them back out into the world for service. The sacrament that comes from this moment in Jesus' life can be imagined as different from an "alert circle".

Let's call it a RENEWAL CIRCLE.

Sacrament of Holy Communion as a RENEWAL CIRCLE; a human analogue where people gather *not to protect against danger*, but to reclaim breath, rest, and presence--where humans gather soul-to-soul, not to shield from danger, but to shield each other from weariness and uncertainty — a sanctuary of presence where tired spirits breathe again."

That Passover night, during Jesus' passion experience, the disciples were both weary, anxious, and uncertain. A defensive posture would be normal, even instinctual. Jesus had been teaching them about the concerning necessity that he would be arrested and executed. They struggled to fathom why this was the pre-determined outcome, especially after the experience just a few days prior of the triumphal and joyous entry into Jerusalem.

And it's true, Jesus does show concern for their spiritual safety. Jesus had been prepping them for some time, and even prayed to God, in John 17:11, that God would "protect [the disciples] in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one." Later in that same prayer, Jesus says, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." (v. 15)

But then at the meal they share, blessed by Jesus' presence with them, the mood shifts from one of protection from harm to mutual care and refreshment. Just as the first Passover meal blessed those Israelites in Egypt, they were to be ready to go, for God was about to deliver them from their bondage. The mood was to be expectant, not defensive. Likewise, we should come to expect God's grace and refreshment in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus' memorial meal is a model for every Christian community about how to address our time and our circumstances. And I don't mean just literal earthquakes.

Given the state of the world, we live in today, it seems like we are in a constant state of alert, wondering when the shaking and instability in our lives will stop. People, markets, governments, all behaving unpredictably, even badly. And things that we once took for granted, changing rapidly.

But thanks be to God, through the power of the resurrection, at every gathering of the beloved community, which could easily become “alert circles” of reaction driven by fear, Christ becomes that presence in our midst, feeding us, nurturing us, healing us, and forgiving us, and opening our hearts to the power of love in service.

After the experience of earthquake for those elephants in the San Diego Zoo seemed to be over, they continued to stay close to each other for the rest of the day. All this activity was caught on security camera footage. Just so, as we gather in our weekly sabbath observance, not just to be refreshed by God, but to be close to one another, not in a posture of defense, but of openness to the presence of our risen lord among us.

We feed on his broken body, we learn from his example of service, and we bless each other with the promise of God’s grace, so that refreshed and renewed, we can go back into the world full of confidence that God’s love is strong, God’s love is free to all, and God’s love is forever. Amen.