

Maundy Thursday
John 13:1-17, 31b-25

24Mar16

There is so much to sort through in Holy Week: the confusing move from festival parade to betrayal, or going through death to new life as the darn-near inexplicable mystery of our faith. That—plus love!—is just plain lot to absorb, with so much central to us in this week.

It's interesting to look at it by proportions: the Gospel of Luke has more than 5 of 24 chapters set in this week. For Matthew it's 8 of 28. Nearly 40% of Mark's story is told between Palm Sunday and Easter morning. The Gospel of John starts the story of Jesus "in the beginning," at the birth of creation, and yet almost half the book takes place in one week, with about six chapters spent on this Maundy Thursday evening alone.

Now, we've tried to fit a lot for you into this evening: remembering that little children lead us. We've eaten together, the night of the Last Supper as an obvious time to share a meal. We told the Passover story, since Jesus was sharing that special meal and redefining it. But we also notice how that further increases the complexity; the Exodus meal provides the defining narrative of the Hebrew scriptures, but tonight becomes a background footnote for our gathering.

So how do we consider all of this? How do we fit it in? Can we begin to comprehend so much that is deep, complex, challenging, rewarding? Probably the most apparent answer is no, we don't. We can't. We could consider much more on freedom from slavery and ancient festivals and the practice of footwashing and political dynamics of Jesus' arrest in the garden—which may or may not be more worthwhile than discussing menu options of communion bread or historical dilemmas of

determining if we're doing it right and who's in. Overall there's just lots to grasp.

Similar to the observance that the ancient creeds spend a lot of time on controversial details and miss out on the main point of what Jesus was up to, you came here this evening not to debate and deliberate details, not to learn history or try to repeat the past.

You're here tonight for love, to be loved and striving to love in return. You're here because we always need practice at this, never have it resolved permanently or perfectly, because it is the hardest, most complex thing in the world, even if it can feel so natural.

In this way, it's no surprise that attendance dwindled since Sunday—either contrasting the crowds for the palm parade with Jesus only having his close disciples around him on Thursday, or comparing our fun and vibrant protest service with this group tonight. It's not about being entertained or getting caught up in the hysteria; you understand being commanded to love means taking community seriously, is about acting as a neighbor, a citizen of earth, about engaging your gifts, taking a risk, asking what's best for others.

Recognizing that loving can be exhausting and frustrating and sometimes draining of life, you also gather here to be loved, with Jesus who gives himself to you whole-heartedly, with all his life and all he has. We may question if that can fit in one night, or one Holy Week, or even in one life. But sharing it at this service, absorbing it with a bite of bread is a start.