

Sermons at St. Luke's

A sermon preached by Peach McDouall on Maundy Thursday, April 21, 2011.

WELCOME!! Welcome to the kingdom of God! Welcome to all! Welcome to this place where heaven reaches down to kiss the world, and say "I love you SO MUCH."

Welcome to this place where the humans who gather (unless they've been dragged here) seriously DO want to love God with their whole heart and soul and mind, and love their neighbors as themselves. To the ones who got dragged here – a special welcome! Whoever dragged you here wants you to know how immensely, infinitely, and uniquely beloved you are – and so do all of us gathered.

WELCOME to the feast that God spreads before us *repeatedly* to keep on reminding us of the Truth of Love and Grace. In a world where sorrow, fear, and misery want us to think THEY are the basis of reality, God sets this table to remind us - again and again, in the face of all our troubles - about the Truth and the Power of a Love that **doesn't count the cost**. The Truth that makes angels sing, and cherubim cry out HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!

For on the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread....

Jesus knew that the person who would betray Him sat at the table with Him as He blessed and broke and shared that bread. And he knew that his friends would all desert and abandon Him, despite their desire to endure whatever it took to follow their teacher. He knew. But He blessed and broke and shared anyway. **That's the point**. Where God reigns, our puny sins can't defeat the Love that is constantly creating and sustaining the entire universe. Jesus was sent to demonstrate this fact. This TRUTH: When we trust in that sustaining Love, that Trust is stronger than stupidity, blindness, fear, misery, sorrow.... AND DEATH.

Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word of God, could have avoided what was coming at Him. As we heard on Sunday, He could have summoned legions of angels to protect him – or just gone back where He came from {poof!}, as he will on Ascension Day... without going through any of this horrific nastiness, humiliation, and pain.

Jesus came among us, and stuck around to prove something, to demonstrate something about the power of Love, and of trusting in that Love. This is something so hard for us finite humans to get our heads around that we have to gather regularly and remind ourselves: The Infinite Power that created the universe and keeps it spinning moment by moment is TRUSTWORTHY LOVE. Not Pharaoh's chariots and chariot drivers who chased the Hebrews out of Egypt.... Not the Babylonian army that took Israel into captivity.... Not the Roman imperial guard that the Pharisees cut a deal with to protect their position in society. Just love, but love stronger than chariots, armies, empires... stronger than betrayal, abandonment, humiliation... and yes --- stronger than death.

We **need** to remind ourselves Who's really in charge, and what that actually means. We do that, strangely, by remembering, week after week, THIS NIGHT... when our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and wine, and shared it with the friends who were about to betray and abandon Him. When He washed

the feet of those betrayers and abandoners, like a slave, and told them that no slave is greater than his or her master.

We *must* remind ourselves – regularly – because it's so hard to get our heads around, and because there's a world out there that desperately needs to know that fear, force, pain, suffering, and death are *not* the ruling powers.

Now, let's face it... we're amazingly faulty vessels for conveying that crucial news to a world where Fukushima is a household word. We're not Jesus. We're the disciples who betray and abandon our Lord when things hit the fan. **But that's the point.** Jesus loved his friends, and God loves US.

Holy Week isn't about beating ourselves up about our stupid sinful weakness. *Really, it's not.* It's about remembering once again, as a community that has embraced the commandment to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind, that God has loved US that way first.

The more time we spend meditating on the mighty acts of Holy Week, the more boggled our tiny minds are by the Love of God in Christ. It's exactly that love and forgiveness, and our trust in that grace, that can enable us to forgive *ourselves* for all the stupidity and betrayal we can't admit to anyone but a loving God. Gathering to remember the Forgiving Love of Christ enables us to conceive of forgiving the ones who have hurt us. Figuring out how to forgive those who have hurt us enables us to fulfill the Torah's command to love our finite human neighbors as ourselves.

And this feast is where we remind ourselves that a gathering of disparate and diverse individuals who share this feast become ONE BODY, which is CHRIST'S BODY. When we bleed, we bleed one blood, which is CHRIST'S BLOOD. Because this table is a miracle of God, given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ to bind us together into His kingdom, where *Love reigns Supreme.*

WELCOME! ONE AND ALL, WELCOME! To the kingdom of God – or at least, this little outpost where we practice, again and again, trying to form the habit of thinking of ourselves *not* as tiny sinful wormish critters, at war with each other for whatever scraps we can gather, but as a beloved community, provided for by a Love so ridiculous that it feeds and blesses even as we betray.

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under this table, but our Lord is a God whose property is *always to have mercy.* Grant us therefore, Gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, and to drink His Blood, that we may EVER MORE dwell in Him, and He in us....

In company with the saints and all faithful people, as One Body, doing all such good works as the Love that created us hast prepared for us to walk in...

With gladness and singleness of heart... Amen.