

What Has Been Handed Down

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April 1, 2021. Today as we celebrate Maundy Thursday, we come together to carry on the sacred traditions that have been handed down to us.

Readings: [Exodus 12:1-14](#), [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#), [John 13:1-17, 31-35b](#)

*** Transcript ***

What traditions or wisdom have been handed on to you? I learned how to make popcorn from my grandmother. Use a big pan — the kind with two handles on it — and put in just enough oil to cover the bottom. Add exactly three kernels of popcorn, put it on medium heat on the stove, and when the third kernel pops add the rest of the popcorn. Shake occasionally. And when the popping slows, remove from the heat. And when all the popping has stopped — not before — pour the popcorn into the bowl. Add real melted butter and salt. Don't skimp.

Over the years, I have tried many ways of making popcorn, from air poppers to oil poppers to kettle corn makers and even microwave, and none have ever measured up. A big part of it is the taste, of course. But more important than that is the connection that I feel to my grandmother. Sure, I use olive oil instead of Wesson oil, and Kosher salt instead of regular table salt. But in all essentials, each time I make popcorn on the stove, I'm participating in what my grandmother handed on to me. What has been handed on to you?

Jesus knew the hour had come for him to depart from this world, that this was the last time he would sit with his disciples and share a meal. It was his last opportunity to hand on his most sacred thoughts before he died — to show them, and us, what is really important.

Today we celebrate Maundy Thursday, and so we begin the most sacred days of the Christian church year. This is a time set aside for us as a community to remember. We have come before our God, acknowledged our sin, and received God's love and forgiveness. And now we begin this journey. Over these days, we remember the extravagant, redemptive, love of God for us and for all of creation revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And today, we remember what our dear friend, Jesus, handed on to us in the hours before he died.

Jesus and his friends were preparing to celebrate Passover, to remember how God had saved them and guided them in the desert. They were following an ancient command that had been handed on to them to tell and retell the story of how God brought them out of slavery and led them through the unknown, to freedom.

Jesus wants us to remember, too. In this last year we have been on a journey into the unknown together, far more than we anticipated when John Hoffmann and I distributed ashes in my first worship service with you all. It has been a sort of exile, our own time in the desert in many ways. And it has been an invitation to explore what it means to be church, and how God is calling us to minister together from here. What traditions and ways of being are serving God well, and what we need to let go of, so we can better contribute to the Kingdom of God.

As we approach the end of the voluntary physical exile from our buildings and one another's physical presence, these questions are all the more important. Tonight, for one of the few times in over a year, I

have three of you with me seated in the pews of the sanctuary. And this is just the start our return to being together in person. We have learned a lot, this last year, about what is possible when we put our minds together. We've committed ourselves to being accessible to one another and our community through technology we never considered before — some of you had never heard of Zoom before March 22, 2020! We've discovered in new ways that we, the followers of Christ, are the church. We're renewing our commitment to welcome and to serve, and we're exploring what that looks like for all of our ministries. And in truth, that is what Christ was doing: welcoming his friends by serving them a meal — we love doing that don't we, and we will do it again — and serving, kneeling to wash his friends' feet. How will we live into Christ's call to welcome and serve, as we journey on into 2021?

Times of transition call us to these questions, and Jesus wants us to remember that we are not alone. God freed the Israelites, and guided them every step of their way. God frees us from all that enslaves us, and guides us on our way. The command to remember has been handed on for centuries, and it is ours now.

Jesus wanted us to know this. Our journey in COVID that is finally beginning to evolve into something of a new normal, like the journey in the desert, can feel dry and long and lonely sometimes. Jesus wanted his friends to know that in spite of what would happen later tonight — later that night — and tomorrow, the next day — no matter how much grief and despair they would feel, Jesus's death would not be the final word. In times like this, with so much division, hatred, and fear in our world, including a pandemic that has gone on far longer than we would have guessed last March, we need to know that God can bring life out of death. We need to know that God is with us — even, and perhaps especially, when things are at their darkest. Jesus tells us to share the Eucharist as a remembrance of his death and the promise of resurrection. And every time we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus shares his very life with us. We are nourished, body and soul, as our bodies are fed and our spirits are filled again with the promise of life and forgiveness. This promise has been handed on to us.

After Jesus and his disciples had finished eating, Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. It was, of course, an act of humility and service. But more than that, washing another person's feet is incredibly vulnerable, intimate, and full of love. Jesus was telling his friends, "I know you. I know those parts of you that you keep hidden. I know your dirt, your sweat, your warts, your pain, your exhaustion. And I love you." There is no part of you that God does not know, intimately. And there is no part of you that God does not love.

And here is the most remarkable thing about Jesus' act of intimate love: Jesus washed the feet of not only John — who will stay at Jesus' side, holding Jesus' mother while he dies — but all of the disciples. The ones who will abandon him. Peter, who will deny he even knew Jesus. Even Judas, who will betray him, turn him over to be tortured and killed. God knows us intimately, and loves us fully, even when we abandon and deny and betray God, and one another.

And then Jesus says, "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." We are called to know and love one another that way, actively, humbly, intimately. We are called to see one another's warts, and love them. We're called to allow God, and others, to see our warts, and love us. We are reminded of the waters of our baptisms, and the promise of God's radical, unconditional love and forgiveness. Be vulnerable to one another. Love one another, no matter what. This vulnerability is terrifying... and it is precisely how God heals and frees us to be the people we were created to be. And how God works through us to heal and free others. This kind of love cannot be contained. It must be handed on, and on, and on.

Today we come together to carry on sacred traditions handed on to us, and as happens each time I make my grandmother's popcorn, we are carried beyond ourselves, beyond this moment in time. This is about us, but it's not just about us. As we share the Eucharist, and tell the stories, we are profoundly connected to God, and to our whole Christian family going back generations. We remember who we are, who we're called to be, as children of God. This is what has been handed on to you. How will you hand that on to those coming after us?

*** Keywords ***

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