

Sermon for Holy Thursday 1 April 2021 @ 7 p.m. @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Scriptures: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17,31b-35

“To receive...”

I went by myself to the first day of school.

We lived only four blocks away, and my mother and I carefully went over the route at home ahead of time. I never knew why she didn't come ... all the other mothers of children I knew were there with them.

I was OK... and kind of lonesome.

I know my earliest memory is of lying in her lap, sucking my thumb, watching the cars go past in the evening twilight. I think I'd been punished for something, but that was all past now, as she rocked us.

Tonight we get right up to the key drama of our religion, and it's still not clear. Do we love first, or does God?

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The United Methodist Church is seriously considering splitting, because some of us want gay people to be ordained, and to marry one another, and others do not. That doesn't show the world we belong to Jesus, does it?

Lots of people call us a Christian nation ... yet how many hundred children are sleeping on the floor in huge rooms @ the southern border right now? How long has that been going on, in a broken immigration system, 'way before this president or the last one or the one before that?

Look @ Germany. I grew up knowing the horror of what the Germans did under Hitler ... and yet how many thousands of refugees have they accepted in recent years? Something like 63,000 one year, I believe. Maybe they've learned something. I've heard they have a saying now about World War II: “We were wrong.”

Where does God show up, and who gets love started?

Maybe love in the Jesus sense is not a feeling at all, but action. Action doesn't come automatically. I can learn, but along the way I make mistakes. I ask questions. I disagree with somebody in the room. If I'm in a relationship, I go through this again and again as long as we're together. It gets better. Sometimes it's downright beautiful ... just feeling; but not always. Uncertainty is part of the deal, from beginning to end. Mystery.

Tonight we remember the quotation, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Jesus said that... but ... I know I felt more loved and safe in my mother's lap as a three-year-old as she rocked and we watched the cars, than I did as a six-year-old on my own the first day of school. I know the difference.

Let us pray.

Lord, thanks for love. Help us. We've lots more to do than when we started. The world seems in worse shape than ever. Put us to work ... bring us to rest ... keep us together ... Drown us in compassion.

In Jesus presence we pray.

Amen.