

Sermon for 6 p.m. Holy Thursday, 6 April 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Scriptures: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalter (*Insert: Read responsively*) Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

"Equality"

That seems like a good word for a sermon on Maundy Thursday this year.

We are so obsessed with equality these days!

Racial equality. Sexual equality. Economic equality. Educational equality.

So was Jesus. Not that he didn't accept recognition for being special, a leader, a teacher, a messenger, a revealer... but just like he told Peter, If I don't wash your feet, you won't be part of my movement.

So the Pope washes people's feet. Ed Ankeny, a retired United Methodist preacher I worked with @ Mount Vernon Place Church, and whom you all had as a District Superintendent when I first served as your pastor, said his United Brethren church had foot-washing services, I think during Holy Week.

My life as a preacher has been fraught with the wish to translate Christianity into something agreeable to non-believers. Scientists. Moderns. My three sons. Muslims, Hindus, members of the other great religions. So, this year, it appeals to me to think of equality as what we're after when we call Jesus divine. Really getting at the point of everything. If we treat everybody as equals, we'll be getting close to the Golden Rule. And, we'll be accepting God's ultimate purpose in rescuing the Jews from Egyptian slavery ... not because they're special, or better than most, or just because God can do whatever God wants and God wanted to ... but because, from a human perspective, you have to start with one human, or two that can breed, to prove anything about anything important to humans... so keeping the Jews alive was essential to making something out of what we understand as the highest form of worldly creature...which is close to what I understand the Bible as saying about humankind.

So, equality.

Let it stand, as one of the highlights of this six-week retreat we call Lent. I've been reminded that Lent spends a lot of time on sin, and improving ourselves, and such like. I still like thinking of Lent as an annual retreat to understand and get better at being Jesus people. If Jesus is our way of describing the real point of everything ... making God as much like a human as you can possibly imagine, while at the same time leaving actual control to God, which we know from experience we humans never succeed in having ... if what we want to say, by following Christ, is that being human can be beautiful, and beneficial not only to humans but the whole world as we know it ... then calling this foot-washing, hand-washing evening on the last week of our annual retreat a lesson in equality seems pretty practical this year, to me. Even kind of beautiful. If the rest of this fellowship we call Bethesda knows we've done this, and hears a

little of why, it might even brighten up our self-confidence about being ourselves, don't you think?

I hope so.

Thanks for coming, and for being one of Jesus' friends, and mine, in this, and so many other ways.

Amen.