

This is Palm Sunday. In our hymns today we celebrate and join in the chorus of people praising the arrival of the Lord in Jerusalem for the Passover. But it is my intent today to go with Him and His disciples to the room where they celebrate the Passover – what we call the Last Supper, the Love Feast.

Sometimes I try to put myself into the mind of Christ as I read about Him in the Scriptures. Let's imagine for a moment how Jesus felt at this Passover supper with His disciples. They are precious to Him. He chose them after a night of prayer with His Father. He has lived with them for three years. They have walked miles together, they have watched His miracles, listened to His teaching, seen Him react in love to some of the least of society.

But He also knows what is coming. When the Shepherd leaves, what happens to the sheep? This evening together is His last chance to prepare their hearts and minds for a horrendous event. But instead of dwelling on the crucifixion, He goes beyond it and explains the sacred purpose of His coming in the first place. He has come to show us the way to the Father, that is, to give us salvation.

The first thing He does during supper is to get up from the meal, lay aside His own garments, tie on a towel and wash their feet. They are appalled at this action since it is a job for the very lowliest slave. He demonstrates, I believe, two major ideas here. First, we are to be servants of one another. But second, we must learn how to receive His love. Peter at first refuses to have his feet washed but then Jesus says that Peter would have no part of Him. Peter has to learn how to be loved. Many of us have learned how to give love but allowing ourselves to receive the love and service of others is part of receiving grace. So it is with the Father. Many of us want to serve Him but we also need to learn to receive His love and forgiveness and gracious mercy. We need to imagine Jesus washing our feet. Then, when we have learned to receive His love, we can extend that love to others. He tells us to do as He did to us.

Then He puts His garments on and joins them at the table again. He tells them that He is going back to the Father to prepare a place for them. But He is not going to leave them as orphans. The Spirit of Truth will be their companion and guide and dwell in them. He will teach them all things and remind them of the teachings of Jesus. So the Spirit of Jesus will replace the Jesus they had known in the flesh.

Now He gives us a metaphor of how this will work. He tells us that He is a vine and we are like branches growing out of it. We take the life-giving sustenance from the vine. The owner and caretaker of the vine is the Father. Just as the branches flourish, nourished by the vine, we are to abide, to live, to reside in Jesus, the vine. How do we do that? By keeping His commandments – to love Him and the Father and our brothers and sisters. And what is the result? He says to us: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

Why is this important? Because as we become His disciples the world will hate us. Jesus is preparing His disciples for the coming persecution which they will experience. He says: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it

hated you.” As His followers, we are to be in the world but not of the world. And we may suffer for it.

Jesus makes a prediction here that is relevant to the past and present times. He says: “...an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.” This is true of Paul, as we know, who persecuted Christians before he met the Lord on the road to Damascus. But it has been true down through the history of the church. How many Christians have killed other Christians in the name of heresy? And today, religious wars are being waged in the name of their God. Jesus makes a profound prophecy here.

Then Jesus speaks to the sorrow of the disciples at His departure. He tells them that they will weep and lament but that the end is joyful. Here He uses another metaphor – a woman in labor who suffers great pain which turns to joy at the birth of her child. This metaphor may be comforting to the disciples then as they face the crucifixion, but it can be comforting to us now. We are living in times when God has allowed evil increasing power in this world and we see much pain and misery around us. But we know that a time is coming when the Lord returns and our sorrow will be turned to joy.

As Jesus comes to the end of the evening He prays to His Father. My dear friends, I commend to you this prayer, chapter 17 of John. I believe it has the power of God’s word to bless and anoint us every time we read it. This Holy Week, try reading it every morning or evening. The major theme of this prayer is union – union with the Father and the Son, and union with our brothers and sisters. This prayer convicts us as we look at the discord of Christ’s church across the centuries. And today the church is torn by many issues. We must repent – we have not loved each other as the Father has loved us.

I am going to read this prayer now to consecrate us as a community of His disciples in preparation for the ordinances of footwashing and love feast which we will be observing this morning. At first He prays for His disciples but then He prays for us as well.

1. After Jesus had spoken these words, He looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son so that the Son may glorify You,
2. since You have given Him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.
3. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
4. I glorified You on earth by finishing the work that You gave me to do.
5. So now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had in Your presence before the world existed.
6. I have made Your name known to those whom You gave Me from the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.
7. Now they know that everything You have given Me is from You;
8. for the words that You gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.
9. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom You gave Me, because they are Yours.

10. All Mine are Yours, and Yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.
11. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them in Your name that You have given me, so that they may be one, as We are one.
12. While I was with them, I protected them in Your name that You have given Me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.
13. But now I am coming to You, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have My joy made complete in themselves.
14. I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.
15. I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but I ask You to protect them from the evil one.
16. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.
17. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.
18. As You have sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.
19. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.
20. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their word,
21. that they may all be one. As You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, may they also be one in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.
22. The glory that You have given Me I have given them, so that they may be one, as We are one,
23. I in them and You in Me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”