

Yr. C, Maundy Thursday--REST
April 18, 2019
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
943 Words

Lessons: Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 116:1, 10-17
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the 4th century St. Augustine of Hippo said it best in his book, *Confessions*: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

After exploring six of the ancient spiritual practices of the Christian faith during these past six weeks of Lent, we arrive at the seventh aspect of following Jesus. Fittingly, on Maundy Thursday we discover the final element of the way of love.

Early in his ministry, Jesus laments that while foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. In other words, there appears to be no *rest* for the weary.

It is important to remember that our itinerant Lord and Savior was not complaining. Rather, he was giving a fair warning to someone who claimed he wanted to follow Jesus. Imagine that—pledging your allegiance to Jesus only to hear him say, “You know. I’m not really sure you are up to it.” St. Augustine is so right. “O Lord, our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

Tonight we mark the celebration of the Last Supper. Tonight we celebrate how Jesus “loved his own who were in the world, how he loved them to the end.” On the night he was betrayed and handed over to be tortured and killed, our Lord *rested* with his disciples. He washed their feet like a servant, and then they all reclined around the table for supper—friends, cowards, a denier, and a traitor...the whole lot of them. “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

This is what Sabbath rest is, after all. Sabbath is about taking time to be with God...making time to be with *Love*...setting aside time to be *in love—with* God, neighbor, self, and creation.

True rest is a spiritual practice of opening our hearts to the One who loves his own who are in the world, loving us to the end. True Sabbath practice means surrendering our *restless* hearts so that they might *find their rest* in God’s loving presence.

A month or two ago I watched a documentary film about Fred Rogers. The title—not surprisingly—is: “Won’t you be my Neighbor.” I grew up on this valuable Christian teaching with layers and layers of meaning slipped right in. I wanted so badly to climb through my television screen into that world. I wanted to ride that trolley car into the tunnel. I wanted to meet King Friday, Mr. McFeely the mailman, Officer Clemmons, and all the rest.

The message—“Won’t you be my neighbor?”—may have seemed simple, but it was also very deep. Mr. Rogers was brilliant at inviting millions of children and adults to stop and rest a while in his neighborhood. What a gift to be able to watch a grown man calmly changing into comfortable shoes and a sweater in order to rest a while with his neighbors! What a gift to hear a wise soul speak so freely and easily about painful and confusing things, just as capably as he was able to talk about fun and fanciful things!

This ordained Presbyterian minister preached on PBS for thirty three years without overtly mentioning God. He didn’t have to! Instead, he *showed us* all about God’s kind of life—a life of grace and peace, a life of liberty and justice for all, a life with forgiveness and love. The Rev. Fred Rogers was a gentle, quiet, honest, follower of Jesus—a follower of the way of love—and he invited a generation to imagine ourselves living in *that kind* of godly, loving neighborhood.

One of my favorite scenes in the documentary is when Mr. Rogers invites African American police officer Clemmons to take off his shoes and join him in resting his feet in a kiddie pool. During a time of terrible violence directed against civil rights activists, this was a powerful sermon that did not require a single word.

It was just *an invitation* from one human being to another to *rest awhile* in the truth that you are acceptable just as you are...you are lovable, just as you are. The punctuation on that sermon was when Mr. Rogers dried the feet of Officer Clemmons.

And this brings us back to Maundy Thursday. This is not *only* the night when Jesus washed his disciples' feet and when he loved his own—even his denier and betrayer—to the very end. This is *also* the night when he gave them (and us) the mandate...*mandatum*...which gives this holy day its name, Maundy Thursday...Mandate Thursday.

And our mandate is twofold: First, “*Do this* in remembrance of God’s love. Stop, *rest in*, and partake of the love of God which is fully present in this sacred meal.”

And then, part two of the mandate is the inspiration we get to take away from this sacrament of renewal. Jesus said, “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.”

St. Augustine was right. Our hearts *are restless* until they rest in God.

The Good News of Maundy Thursday is that we have a chance to glimpse this blessed rest in the Sacrament of Foot Washing and Holy Eucharist. And then, we get to *practice it* by loving our neighbors as Christ has loved us.

We can only do these loving things by resting...resting in the assurance of being *loved as we are in this world*, and being loved to the end.

Amen.