

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 8, 2004 – Grace Church – Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

This evening is very special. We gather to celebrate a meal, a reenactment of the Seder. We come now to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. We gather to welcome our young people who have prepared for their First Communion. We hear about Jesus' commandment to love and witness it in the foot washing. In so many ways, what we are witnessing is the ordinary becoming the extra ordinary.

Take this cracker. Do you know what it is called? It's "matzo." This is the unleavened bread eaten by our Jewish brothers and sisters at a meal with lamb and other foods. An ordinary meal, yet it has taken on extra ordinary meaning. The people of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. God choose an ordinary man, Moses, to lead the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, into freedom. On the night of the Passover, the Jews painted the doorposts of their homes with the blood of the lambs. The people huddled together, ordinary people, around an ordinary meal.

That ordinary meal became the miracle of God. God takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Now that meal celebrates freedom and new life. The Jews see how God works through ordinary people to accomplish the divine will. It is the story of transformation that occurs over and over again in the Bible.

Two thousand years ago, a dozen disciples and other followers gathered in an ordinary room. They ate an ordinary. But the extraordinary again happened. Jesus took bread, much like this, bless it and broke it, then said, "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you." An ordinary body would become the extraordinary vehicle of our salvation. Then Jesus would take a cup of wine like this one, after he blessed it said, "Drink this all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant." Ordinary wine now means the blood of Christ sacrificed for us. An extraordinary act consummated in the Crucifixion.

Now we gather for this ordinary meal every Sunday, and tonight, to remember that first night we call "the Last Supper." We participate in the extraordinary each time we are part of the Holy Eucharist. Jesus took the ordinary life and elevated it to an extraordinary event.

During this night, Jesus took the ordinary event of washing feet and made it a symbol of our call as Christians. The practice was to take a towel and water when guests arrived to a meal. It was an act of service and hospitality to wash the guests' feet. It was a humbling act. It's the act of an ordinary servant. Jesus did it to show his disciples, and us, a new way of being. It is an extraordinary way marked by ordinary love. It is a love that has the power to transform our lives and the world.

Sometimes the ordinary lives we live seem so far from anything that is extraordinary. Sometimes health issues, job loss, financial strains or the death of loved ones ... the stuff of ordinary life ... weighs us down. I know what that is like. In December, my mother died. Three weeks ago, my grandmother died. Two ordinary women, but they meant so much to me. It seems, as life is just too heavy sometimes. To make matters worse, yesterday at the staff meeting I nothing to contribute at the end of the meeting. That is the time when I ask each person to share where they have met God in the past week.

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When it came to me, I had nothing to share. God seems strangely absent from my life. Life feels too ordinary. To make matters worse, last weekend I discovered that someone had passed fraudulent checks on my personal account. They had emptied half of our money before I froze the account. I spent three days struggling with the matter, meeting with bank personnel. Why me God? I asked. This is Holy Week! I don't need the grief.

I tried to look for what God was trying to say to me, but it was nowhere to be found. Then the extraordinary happened. That afternoon, I went to get the mail. Now you need to know that opening the mail has become a labor rather than joy. I was afraid what the next surprise might be. But there was a letter from a parishioner. She had heard of my plight and sent a check. She also offered to empty her bank account to help me cover the losses. It was an ordinary person making an extraordinary act of love.

But that's not all that happened. Later the bank called and said they were restoring all the money that had been taken! An extraordinary event! All right God, I get it! Have a little faith! Celebrate the compassion that others show you! Stop worrying, you'll be okay! An ordinary event became the extraordinary.

That's what this night is all about. Jesus says, serve and love. He challenges us to act. In doing so, we can take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. By our loving others, we begin to usher in the Kingdom of God! Jesus takes the ordinary in our lives and says use it. Make a difference in the lives of others. Help the extraordinary to happen!

The opportunity for us to take the ordinary and transform it will come in May. We will host the IHOC homeless shelter at Grace Church. Ten men struggling with their lives will be here. They need food, companionship and shelter. We will offer it for two weeks. Each of us can help. We can prepare food, sleep over, and talk with them while they are here. We can take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. We can live into what Jesus commands us to do ... we can love.

This night is about God changing the ordinary into the extraordinary through Jesus. Now we participate in the extraordinary. Now we are called to transform the ordinary. We have all that we need, ourselves. Now we are challenged to make it happen. What will you do to make the ordinary extraordinary? It's about the ordinary becoming the extraordinary. It's about you, Jesus and me.