

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 2, 2015  
Maundy Thursday  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm 78:9-25  
I Corinthians 11:23-26  
Luke 22:14-30

The sermons on each of the nights of this week are going to attempt to answer one simple question: *Why are we here?*

My answer to that question is rather simple, and yet I hope it will be meaningful for us. *We are here because we are part of a tradition.*

We have a tradition that says to us that these three days are the most important three days in all of history. We did not invent this stuff. We did not figure it out on our own. And we are not living our lives and our faith as islands unto ourselves.

We are not religious or spiritual “innovators.” We are not religious entrepreneurs. We are not making stuff up as we go. We stand inside of a story, an old, old story.

Why are we here tonight? We are here because of others who saw things, who witnessed events, and who knew people who were important to those events. Tonight, tomorrow, and Saturday, we will ask the question: *Why are we here?* And in each case, the answer will be the same. *We are here because we are part of a tradition.*

But each night we will also answer this question in a specific way. So tonight, on Maundy Thursday, we ask the question: *Why are we here?*

The answer: **We are here tonight because we are part of a tradition that claims that in the sacrament of Holy Communion, the church proclaims and makes Jesus known in ways that preaching alone cannot do.**

Paul tells the Corinthians: “whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (I Cor. 11:26).

The word “proclaim” as Paul uses it here is a sort of technical term. What Paul seems to be saying is that when we gather and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are not merely “announcing” to ourselves and to the world that Christ died and rose again, as though we had short memories and constantly need to be reminded of this. The “proclaiming” is not merely in an *informational* sense.

The proclaiming is more of *enactment*. When we come to the table and enact these sacred actions and say these sacred words, the meaning and power and reality of Jesus’ death is brought forward into the present moment. Christ’s saving work is present and active in our midst *NOW*. The poet Malcolm Guite expresses it this way in his sonnet for Maundy Thursday:

*Here is the source of every sacrament,  
The all-transforming presence of the Lord,  
Replenishing our every element,  
Remaking us in his creative Word.  
For here the earth herself gives bread and wine,  
The air delights to bear his Spirit’s speech,*

*The fire dances where the candles shine,  
The waters cleanse us with his gentle touch.  
And here he shows the full extent of love  
To us whose love is always incomplete,  
In vain we search the heavens high above,  
The God of love is kneeling at our feet.  
Though we betray him, though it is the night,  
He meets us here and loves us into light. (Sounding the Seasons, 36)*

Maundy Thursday is known as the birthday of the Eucharist, because it remembers Jesus' institution of the very first Eucharist at the Last Supper. It is an important occasion because on every other occasion during the year when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, we are giving thanks *through* the Eucharist for God's saving actions. But on this day, we celebrate the Lord's Supper by giving thanks *for* the Eucharist itself.

Why are we here tonight? We are here tonight because we are part of a tradition. A tradition that teaches us that in the sacrament of Holy Communion the church offers Jesus to the world in ways that preaching alone cannot do. A tradition that teaches us that when we gather at the Lord's Table, Jesus is mysteriously present to us, extending his love and grace and healing into our lives. We are part of a tradition that teaches us that we can only "proclaim" Christ in this way as we recognize our calling to live together in love toward God and one another.

That, in part, is why we are here tonight. We are here to take our place in the story. To live into the tradition that has been passed on to us. To receive his

grace, and to become a means of his grace to a hurting world. So come with faith,  
and let us proclaim our Lord's death until he comes.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.