

This morning I want to begin by stating, I fear what has happened in America, what has happened because of fear and terrorism and greed and power, is that we as a people have lost our Prime Directive. In Medicine, there is an underlying principle, part of the Hippocratic Oath, to Do No Harm. In Kindergarten and Little League, we learned to be Good Sports to play by the rules and that friendship was more important than winning, we look to our leaders especially in the Courts as being Ethical and Moral. One of the foundational Commandments is THOU SHALT NOT KILL; What God says in Genesis, looking over everything and everyone in all Creation is it is VERY GOOD. Somehow in the midst of all the changes to the world, we have forgotten those two.

The week after Christmas, I was privileged to officiate at our son's marriage. This weekend, they are closing on their first home! I cannot be certain if it will be true for them, or was for you, but I recall the signing of that first mortgage as realization of change. When you were in college, when you were in those first jobs and lived in an apartment, whether it was factual or not, there was a safety net, that if life did not work out we could always live with our parents... Meals were prepared, Laundry was done, there were fewer bills to pay, they had two cars... While never tested, there was this imaginary trust that in our Parent's house, there was always a vacancy reserved for us... Even when there is not a good relationship between parent and child, your room was a place of privacy a place you belonged... but once you signed that mortgage, that "vacancy in my father's house" was no longer guaranteed.

Our reading this morning comes from the dialogue at Passover dinner, after Jesus had washed their feet, before Jesus' arrest, crucifixion and resurrection, when Jesus first served the Sacrament of Communion. That setting is monumentally important, because those circumstances and relationships CHANGE EVERYTHING. The Rabbi, the Savior, GOD with us, KNELT and WASHED OUR FEET like a servant... PASSOVER is not only an annual Holiday, but a Sacred Meal claiming Identity: GOD CARES & SAVES US... The ONE Cheered by the crowd as MESSIAH SENT FROM GOD was Betrayed, Arrested by Powers that Be... The HEALER, the TEACHER, The SAVIOR SUFFERED, DIED, WAS BURIED, Yet even Death & Shame, with all the Power of Religion & Empire could not stop GOD'S LOVE FOR US! And GOD did not KILL in retaliation, GOD did not declare the Creation CORRUPT, God still LOVED, GOD continued to be GOD!

These are the words that the disciples did not understand until after the experience of the resurrection. The Disciples: Thomas and Phillip are using logic and reason to try to comprehend what Jesus is saying, "Show Me the Father and I will believe... Show Me where you are Going and I will understand," but Jesus is not using a philosophical argument. Christian Faith is not Theoretical or Philosophical. Christian Belief is not a matter of Memorization, Authority, Power, Possessions, Understanding or Reason. Christian Faith is a matter of Covenant Commitment, that no matter what YOU ARE LOVED. You are in a relationship with each of us here, with God, with Creation, as the body of Christ. That Body of Christ has compassion, mercy, empathy, trust. Even when there is brokenness, hurt, death, still you are loved. Jesus was naming that he had to leave the disciples, but he would return, and like trying to explain to our Spaniel, they do not get it, they do not yet know to trust and believe.

At which Jesus offers truth, which has become a stumbling block to ecumenical relationships. Jesus quite plainly says "No one can come to the Father except by me." At age 13 or 14 in Confirmation Class, this was completely reassuring! Jesus is the means of relationship with God, the way to Eternal Life, the Answer. By being Baptized and Confirmed, you have a seat at GOD's Table. At 13 or 14 being included, having the answer was extremely important.

However, a decade or so later in Seminary, I had friends who were Jewish, and friends who were Buddhist, and several who were Muslim... If Jesus is the only way to the Father, no one can come to him except through Jesus, what about sincere believers in these other religions?

Rather than being condemning, what I came to understand is the context Jesus provides in this passage, "In my father's house are many rooms." How many of us have ever travelled to other countries? A few years ago, I went to Israel, and as Christians when it is 90 degrees and you are at the Mountain of the Beatitudes where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount beside the Sea of Galilee, you want to wear a hat... When you go to the Wailing Wall in the City of Jerusalem, reverence for GOD dictates that you wear a Yarmulke, or a Prayer Shawl to cover your head... 100 feet away is the most holy site in Islam called the Dome on the Rock, and there you do not wear a Yarmulke or Jewish Prayer Shawl. So if seeking GOD in the Jewish Room, the way to God is through the Law of the Torah. If seeking GOD In Buddhism, the way to God is through reincarnation. If Muslim, the way to God is through acceptance and following The Koran which are the Law Scrolls of Muhammed. But if you want to have a relationship with GOD as Father, the only religion which identifies GOD as Father, is Christianity.

Recently, my wife and I went to the Tucson Botanical Gardens. If you have not been, it is well worth the trip. Walking through, you see plants which can thrive here in Tucson, some of which are from Africa, some from Asia, some from South America, some from the Plains States, and then there are the Butterflies in the Orchid House. Each, were beautiful in their own habitat/environ. Personally, I love growing Roses. Anything you can stick into manure, and it thrives on neglect, I can grow. And I trust GOD to have other habitats, where others plants grow and bear fruit.

What intrigues me about this passage, is that the Messiah who came into the World, and history acknowledged that we had no room for him to be born, would on the night before his arrest, when he gave us this Sacrament, thinking/praying about what was to come in the Crucifixion and Resurrection, described that GOD's Mansion has many rooms where he was going to prepare a place for us.