

Meditation  
Maundy Thursday 2009  
Rev. Patrick Hunnicutt

Focus Texts:  
John 1  
Genesis 2  
Exekiel 37  
Luke 22

Until we gathered around the table, it had been an otherwise normal Tuesday afternoon for your pastors.

As is our weekly custom, we spent the day in meetings, immersed in details and planning, the nuts and bolts of institutional ministry.

- Worship services were constructed and deconstructed.
- Visitor lists were reviewed.
- Prayer concerns were shared and contemplated. All in a good day's work.

But then we found ourselves at the edge of the table.

With our black pulpit robes hanging ceremoniously from our shoulders, we beheld the empty metallic urn and the sealed ashes of a young man whose death came much too soon, much too tragically.

We delicately handled the powdery remains of a life that had been betrayed of its earthly purpose; a body -- once pulsing with electricity and girded by sinewy muscle and sturdy bone -- now reduced to the barest of elements.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

As we committed his earthly remains to their final resting place, we who spent the afternoon in ceaseless conversation became silent, our voices stilled by sadness, discomfort, awkwardness and reverence.

There was something else, in that silence.

Perhaps the best word is anticipation.

Anticipation...that in those ashes quivered the mysterious power of God, poised frightfully and wonderfully to act; to make good on a distant promise of new life, redeemed of all its violence and pain.

How can one speak in the face of such holiness?

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Holy Scriptures echo this anticipatory silence.

Adam and Eve tussle in that first garden, sampling and succumbing to the same fruits dangled before us every day:

- beauty, sensuality and desire

- temptation, disobedience and shame,
- vulnerability, and our clumsy attempts to cover it up.

Deftly and ominously, the evening breeze alights on the wayward pair, frisking their reddened cheeks with the rustlings of a crestfallen God on the hunt.

Like deer locked in the rifle's scope, the naked inhabitants freeze, hoping that stillness and quiet will spare them God's inquisitive voice.

But it comes, wafting through the trees... "Where are you?"

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Somewhere in ancient Israel, there is a valley. It's dry. Desolate.

Piles of dead bones litter an arid patch of abandonment. The dusty tundra breathes hopelessness, loneliness, decay.

The prophet, Ezekiel, feels God's hand on his shoulder as he is thrust into the skeletal landscape.

God will soon speak the words that will knit those bones noisily together into flesh and blood.

But first, there is nothing but quiet – the potency of God, poised silently among death and dust. Starting tonight, the walls of Jewish homes will reverberate with the sounds of children, gathered around a Passover table, asking the ancient question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

In the brief interlude between the question asked and the answer given, silence will linger. Tonight, we insert ourselves into that gap and ask "What is different about this Thursday night, for us?"

For most of us, this day has been no different than most others, filled with meetings and errands, practice and preparation, the nuts and bolts of everyday life.

But now we find ourselves, like the first disciples, like the people of Agudas Achim, and your pastors, gathered around a table.

And on that table sits something holy.

*"This is my body, broken for you."*

*"This cup is the new covenant in my blood."*

In little time, the speaker of these words will be betrayed, much too soon, much too tragically, unto death...his bones and spirit crushed on the cross.

If indeed this night is to be any different for us, it is because we who hear Christ's words, who behold his broken body and outpoured blood on this table, are confronted by the very power of God to act:

- To ride the springtime breeze in search of the naked and vulnerable and lost.
- To thrust us before the ashes and bones of a dead valley and breathe into them new life.

- To incarnate everyday bread and grape juice, such that the kingdom of heaven might inhabit earthly beings. Inhabit us.

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In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

We whose days are filled with many words will leave this sanctuary in silence.

That silence may come from sadness, discomfort, awkwardness, or something akin to reverence.

May our silence also tremble with frightful and wondrous anticipation, at what God has done, is doing, and will do through the Word of God, who has become flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Let us gather around the table.

And be silent.

For how can one speak in the face of such holiness?

Amen.