

Church of St John the Evangelist, Elora
Maundy Thursday
April 14, 2022
Canon Paul Walker

Tonight we begin the three holy days known as the Great Triduum.

These days invite us into the depths of the mystery of the incarnation - God's initiative to become flesh. In the form and expression of Jesus Christ God takes the initiative to enter in to the depths of our human experience.

They are three days that are marked from sundown to sundown to celebrate the events of the Passion of Christ.

Tonight is the first act of three parts. It is like one very long liturgy in three distinct acts. We begin tonight and we don't emerge out of it with a final blessing until Easter Sunday morning.

Tonight the service concludes in darkness and as the altars are being stripped bare, we hear the story of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane. He asks his disciples to stay awake and pray with him. But they are already overcome with exhaustion, and they fall asleep.

The reading concludes with Jesus saying that his betrayer is at hand and all the disciples flee.

And in the darkness and silence, so do we.

Tonight it is the Passover Festival, an annual festival that Jesus celebrated to mark God's work of delivering the Hebrews from the angel of death. Any household in Egypt that was marked with the blood of an unblemished lamb was passed over and delivered from death - the tenth plague on Pharaoh and Egypt. Having been passed over, the Hebrews were then instructed to immediately leave. They were led through the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army close on their heels, and they entered into the water, which was ordered to part, so they could land safely on the other side in the land of Canaan.

It is a remarkable story of freedom from oppression, deliverance from death, and the promises of God.

But to get there they had to enter the sea. There is a rabbinic tradition that says that Moses waded into the waters up to his knees, then up to his waist, and then up to his chest before

anything happened. Looking behind him, Moses saw the enemy; looking in front of him, Moses saw the water. Either way he looked it didn't look good. They had to enter into the depths before they saw a sign of freedom. It's like entering into the great Triduum.

At the Passover Festival, the commemoration of this event would involve preparing a Passover lamb. So, with all of the preparations made, Jesus identifies himself as their servant by washing their feet, and while celebrating the meal, he identifies himself as the Passover lamb, the bread broken, the wine poured out. In the midst of all of this, and on the eve of the betrayal, arrest, trial, condemnation, denial, and crucifixion, Jesus gives them them a new commandment: to love one another.

That is such an important piece to hear. As we go through the recollection of the events of the Passion, and hear of the horror of it all, Jesus invites us to love one another. There's nothing new about this mandate, but what is new, is that Jesus says "I give you an example". This is the only time that he uses these words. He takes on the role of a servant and invites us to follow his

example of humility, service and love. As we enter a sea that threatens to overwhelm us, devour us, and kill us, we are invited to do the hardest thing ever: to love one another. "That," Jesus says, "is how people will know that you are my followers, if you have love for one another."

