

Tonight we continue our journey through the three great days of the church year – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday – that lead us to Easter morning. Every year we tell the same stories, which are, in essence, one love story, told in three parts.

Tonight we pick up with – A Love Story, Part 2.

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Last night, after remembering the final night Jesus spent with his friends – when he gave the gift of Eucharist and demonstrated the power of servant leadership – our Gospel ended with Jesus' final commandment to his friends: love one another as he has loved them.

He spent his final hours feeding and washing and preparing his friends for life without him, showering them with love and grace. As the Gospel tells us:

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

But that wasn't the end.

In the synoptic Gospels we get the story of Jesus taking his friends to the Mount of Olives to pray in the garden before the time of his arrest – and even when they failed to remain awake and watch with him, he loved them.

Throughout the narrative of Jesus' final hours, as narrated in John's Gospel which we just read, Jesus' love burned bright over and over.

He eschewed violence in the garden, healing the slave whose ear was cut off. He refused to rise to the bait set for him during his trial, and then silently carried the cross of the empire to his death. When he saw the women and the beloved disciple standing close to the cross where he hung, he gave them to each other – still creating communities of love even as he was dying.

Only then did he breathe his last, saying, “*It is finished.*” He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

But that was not the end.

Nor was his burial, when loving hands prepared his body and laid him in the tomb.

It certainly felt like the end for his friends – whose grief and despair seemed to block out the memories of all the times he told them this would happen – when out of love he had tried to prepare them, by telling them about his approaching suffering and death with the assurance that he would rise again.

And while we think we know the end, these 2000 years later, and the temptation is strong to jump ahead to the joy of Easter, today we are asked to remain in this seeming end to the story.

Jesus dead and buried behind an immovable stone. And we are asked to think about where we would have been in the story.

The one who lost faith and betrayed with a kiss? The one who denied him three times? The one with power who was swayed by opinion and had no moral compass? An angry voice in a crowd that had been whipped into a frenzy of hate and fear? One of those who cast lots and exploits the vulnerability of others? The one who mocks the powerless? The one who carried Christ’s lifeless body? The one who brought aloes and myrrh and linen cloths? The ones who prepared him for burial? The one who laid him in the tomb?

Many of them all at once?

Our own Cheri McClanahan shared with me a reflection she wrote about Good Friday, which she gave me permission to share. You can find on page 29 of your worship bulletin.

Remembering Good Friday

I cried today
I cried today
For fear of being shunned;
with Peter three times I would deny today,
before the cock crowed at the rising sun.
I cried today
I cried today
For fear of standing out;
with all the others in the crowd today,
“Crucify Him” my voice would also shout.
I cried today
I cried today
For power and money are things we still seek;
with Judas my taste is bitter sweet today,
flavored from the kiss upon our Redeemer’s cheek.

Tonight and tomorrow we sit and we cry because Christ’s life was finished all those centuries ago. And because we know the myriad ways we have betrayed the love so freely given to us. But...

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Through the mystery of grace, and the power of God’s love, the tomb was an ending that would be the beginning of something glorious.

But that’s another story for another day – and to hear the next part you’ll have to come back Easter morning. Rest well and I’ll see you then for A Love Story, Part 3.