

**The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd**

The Rev. Morgan S. Allen

April 12, 2017

*Maundy Thursday, John 13:1-17*

Come Holy Spirit, and enkindle in the hearts of your faithful, the fire of your Love. Amen.

Good Evening.

My mother's mother, Granny, married a man nearly twenty years older than she. When he died in his late fifties, Granny was widowed as a young woman, the mother of a college student and two adolescents. She took the necessary licensing classes and became a realtor, and not long thereafter Granny bought a house on Regency Street in Monroe, Louisiana. I can remember no less than one thousand times that she launched into a treatise on why – as a realtor, you understand – she chose that particular neighborhood and that particular house, about how it would maintain its value into her old age...and I suspect it was all true.

Exactly ten years ago this week, Granny moved into Saint Joseph's Home. In the way these transitions tend to happen, the decision for her to move came slowly and painfully, but the action of the move followed swiftly.

On the Tuesday afternoon of that Holy Week, Missy; a three-year-old Michael; an infant Ginna; and I; drove to Monroe, and we pulled into the circle drive at the Roman Catholic nursing home just as my mom, my Aunt Nancy, and Granny, were getting out of Nancy's Lincoln for Granny's first trip to her room upstairs. They had arranged a lunch date for Granny earlier in the day, while the movers loaded and ferried the seven or eight pieces of furniture Granny wanted to bring with her, but that would not fit into a car. I remember Granny wearing a lightweight blue jacket and pants, and she walked deliberately toward the double doors marked "Assisted Living." She held her hands together tightly at her chest so that her two daughters, who each held one of their mother's elbows, looked to be lifting her into the brick building by her thin arms.

Our timing felt rotten on any number of levels – Michael Stephens going bananas doing "The Monkey Dance" in the parking lot while Granny's lower lip quivered, my mother dutifully distracted by Ginna's grins and gurgles – and so I quickly offered to come back. *Please, please, please believe me*, I thought to myself. *It's really no problem for me to load up our car and get as far from all this as possible!* Nevertheless and out of either hospitality or desperation, they insisted we stay. Together, we went inside...and we went upstairs...and we went into my grandmother's new home: a sixteen-by-eighteen foot efficiency apartment along a hallway that reminded me of the old Power Dormitory at LSU...*good gracious*. I wondered what Gran, the certified realtor, was thinking.

As part of her welcome into The Home, the beautician had been called to do Granny's nails in the beauty parlor downstairs. With Michael by now threatening every one of the several dozen ceramic birds perched on the built-in bookshelves, Missy suggested we take leave for a time so that Granny could enjoy her manicure and pedicure. By now, everyone agreed. Just before we left, Granny, who was sitting in one of the high, wing-backed chairs that used to be in her parlor next to the piano – I guess it had still been there up and until just a couple of hours before – Granny gripped my hand, the way Michael and Ginna used to do when they saw a dog or heard a car horn: *Honey, will you bless Granny's room when you come back?*

"Of course, Granny. Of course," I replied.

Carrying all the emotions of the moment was like moving a mattress up a flight of stairs: heavy and awkward and difficult to grip.

When we returned a couple of hours later, Granny was still downstairs with the manicurist. I found her sitting in a rocking chair barefooted, the lightweight blue pants pulled up above her knees with her arms and legs rigidly outstretched. To dry her nails, she patted and kicked the air with the dexterity and look of an infant in a high chair. As Granny introduced me to the manicurist as her "handsome grandson, the priest" my mom walked in and told Granny that they had not yet unpacked her flip-flops, and that she would have to walk up to her room barefooted. And, in that instant, everything changed:

"But where are my stockings and shoes? Did someone take them?" Granny asked, accusingly.

"No, mama, they're right here. But if you wear them, you'll ruin your nails and your stockings and your shoes," My mother reassured.

"Well, I want to wear them."

"Please, mama, help me out a little here – just walk barefooted."

"No. It's dirty. The floor here is *dirty*."

"Mama, I will wash your feet," my mother said. "I swear to God with Morgan and this nice lady as my witnesses, I will wash your feet when we get upstairs. Just, *please*, let's go upstairs."

Less than Granny *agreed* to walk upstairs barefooted, she relented, and we said our prayers together. With water and a spray of greenery from the front-yard oak tree and bushes where I played as a child, we asked God's blessing on Granny's new home, and, after we left, I knew that either Granny or my mother would uphold the other in their agreement and her feet would be washed, each believing they were doing the other a service and a favor.

Knowing that his time is short, Jesus has supper with his friends, and the emotions at the table are complicated...unwieldy...a mattress in a staircase. What kind of grief and fear might this man have felt with the world pressing in on him through the darkness outside the home where he ate? Before it was Good News, the promise of God had been a hard word for the powerful in Jerusalem to hear, but the inevitability of his arrest did not make its nearing prospect any easier for the one who would be marked and hanged a criminal.

Judas is there at the table, too, and I wonder what emotion rested in his lap as he ate his bread and drank his wine. Could he really eat? Did he regret what he had done? What did he hear and what did he feel when Jesus said, “Not all of you are clean”?

As surely as some of the disciples appreciated the weight of Jesus’ gestures, others, just as certainly, did not. So, while some would have been guarded and grieving, looking for a wall to hold up with a shoulder, others would have been gleefully naive, like young children on move-in day at the nursing home.

And isn’t it always something like this – complicated and messy – in these our own lives, in this our own day? I mean, how many supper tables have you gathered around with family and friends and thought to yourself: *You know, this is swell. Everyone is on the same page as I am, living their lives just exactly the way God and I would have them.* If we wait until that kind of “perfect” moment to tell the people we love that we love them – to show the people we love the love that we have *for* them – we will be waiting a lifetime. Jesus’ servant actions lean into the awkwardness of his moment; reset everyone to the same level; and reclaim the occasion in the name of Love.

Having washed the feet of his friends, Jesus picks up his robe again, now dirty and wet, and puts it back on. He returns to the table and explains, “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you...I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:14-15,34-35).

God continues calling us to love and to service. This night, the pitchers and bowls have been set, and God calls us now, following the *mandatum* of Christ, to do for one another what he has done for his friends.

I invite you, therefore, to come forward, if you will – to wash and to be washed – that we would announce ourselves as disciples of Jesus, and that we would love one another well.

In the name of the servant King,  
*Amen.*