

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 13:1-17-31b-35

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 116:1,10-17

1 Cor. 11:23-26

April 18, 2019  
Maundy Thursday

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I once had a Golden Retriever named Simi. She was dark red in color, not like your typical golden retrievers. She was a perpetual puppy, never wanting to grow up and always ready to play. She was my kids' first dog, ruler of the house, queen of the neighborhood, constant companion, and a true boys' best friend. I remember that you could never sit down on the floor with her because she would get so excited that you were down on her level that she would simply climb all over you with pure joy. She didn't understand the concept of restraint and good manners when it came to love.

One day, we brought home a kitten. Her name was Lily and she quickly became Simi's close confidant. Not that they were always together but you could tell they had a mutual respect for each other - a peacefulness and a comfort that came from being in the same room together.

However, when Simi was just 6 years old she got bone cancer and developed a tumor on her leg that made walking increasingly difficult. We monitored her mobility and her pain. As she began to fight the tumor she had to wear a cone around her head to keep her from hurting herself. And then one day, the inevitable decision came that Simi could no longer go on with the pain and discomfort she was facing. So I set a date with the vet to have her put down.

When that morning came, we all said our goodbyes....or at least I thought we all had. As Simi sat next to the stairs unable to move, immobile from discomfort, Lily silently came down and sat on the stair that was at eye level with Simi. For a few minutes they just looked at one another, calm and quiet. And then the most miraculous thing happened. Lily reached over the cone with her paw and tapped Simi on the head three times and then she resumed her quiet vigil until I took Simi out the front door and down to the car.

That one moment between these two friends taught me so much. There was a kindness, a love, a deep knowing that is unmistakable. There was also deep courage. Well, maybe that's a strange thing to say about two animals but the lesson for us humans grows out of Lily's ability to simply sit with Simi. To sit even though it may hurt. To sit even though we may want to turn away from the inevitable. To sit with the uncertainty of what we are going to lose. To sit when the only thing left to give is...love.

When I read our Gospel account of Jesus spending the evening with his disciples, I imagine this kind of quiet love...when very few words are spoken. Each moment is precious and the disciples seem to know to slow down, stop what they are doing and just be with Jesus.

It's a moment when they surely wanted time to stand still. And, Jesus, in his humble, giving way gave each disciple just a little more time. Time just for them as the warm water gently poured over their feet. Jesus reached down with his hands and washed the dirt away. In the solitude and in the stillness, they held for one another a deeply holy moment.

But in a few hours, the room would grow quieter still, as the disciples and Jesus left one by one. The room would become a hollow reminder of the people who once broke bread together and allowed their feet to be washed. An empty room that once held the quiet reverence of their time together.

There is an inevitable hollowness to our goodbyes – not in the nature of the goodbye itself but in the space that follows. And isn't that we are often most afraid of...the space that will follow our time together.

One of my favorite poets encourages us through the hollowness, the emptiness like this...

So come and sit  
in this place  
made holy  
by its hollows.  
You think you have  
too much to do,  
too little time,  
too great a weight  
of responsibility  
that none but you  
can carry.

I tell you,  
lay it down.  
Just for a moment,  
if that's what you  
can manage at first.  
Five minutes.  
Lift up your voice –  
in laughter,  
in weeping,  
it does not matter –  
and let it ring against  
these spacious walls.

Do this  
until you can hear  
the spaces within

your own breathing.  
Do this  
until you can feel  
the hollow in your heart  
where something  
is letting go,  
where something  
is making way.

Goodbyes are not easy. The pain and the sorrow are hard to hold, and even harder to move through. Yet, Maundy Thursday calls us to come and sit. Feel the hollowness that finds its way into your heart. Allow yourself to be present to the grace that sustains you even when your soul aches for peace.

And when you come to have your feet washed, I want you to close your eyes and imagine Jesus kneeling, pouring warm water over your feet, washing away the pain, washing away the heartache that you may be carrying. Imagine Jesus sitting quietly with you. Sit quietly because the only gift left to give is love. Amen.