

“Sooner or Later”  
John 13:1-17 and 31-35  
Maundy Thursday  
First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota  
March 29, 2018  
Rev. Glen Bell

Jesus loved them to the very end.

Jesus has come to the end. It is his hour to depart. With love and longing, he shares with his friends, “Where I am going, you cannot come.”

It’s just like our memory of our mother’s gentle caress, the voice of our father on the other end of the phone, the tender comfort and care of our loved one. It made all the difference.

But our mom or dad or cherished one may now be gone, deceased, out of reach. We hate it. We hate Jesus’ departure. We can’t stand separation. We experience the distance as sterile, cold, empty, lonely. We ache deep down in our bones.

But Jesus has the courage to turn all that on its head. He invites us to a new way of life, just as fear and anxiety are getting the better of us. “Love one another,” he says, “the way I love you. This way, everyone will know that you and I are one, together, even across the distance.”

Friends, this is a different way of being, a deeper level of awareness. Far too often, you and I live out the stress of our daily existence. Everything becomes hurried, jumbled, a contest, a competition. We lose ourselves. We lose our identity as we wonder about acquaintances and co-workers and neighbors and the others in the car alongside us: Are you for me or against me? Are you safe – or are you a danger?

Jesus invites us to look and live differently. As we remember and sing and pray and celebrate our faith, we rehearse our oneness with Christ. Separated from Christ on earth, we give thanks for the Spirit of Christ within us. Jesus may be away from us in body, but never in spirit.

This is how and why we are able to sing

*Look to God, do not be afraid,*

*Lift up your voices, the Lord is near.*

*Lift up your voices, the Lord is near.*

We Presbyterians are peculiar. In our polity and practices and liturgy, we sometimes get caught in order, predictability, control. We are a lot like Peter. He was horrified at the thought of his Teacher and Lord washing his feet.

Like Peter, we have definite ideas about things. When it comes to singing in worship, we most often want to sing the first verse, then the second, then the third. So the very idea of Taizé music is foreign.

But as Steven Phillips shared last week, Taizé is a prayer language for us, a language within words and beyond words, as we rest in Christ and reflect on Christ.

Taizé music reorients me. It opens me up. It invites me to a new place with Jesus. It invites me to think about my faith, and more importantly, to experience it, to release my anxieties and rest in my faith, to find renewed strength to go out and serve.

This is what I discover. When God feels far away, as I look to the Lord and release my fears, as I lift my voice, I discover that God is near. When I feel the Lord is far away, the Holy Spirit helps me rediscover that God is present. When I need to let go and simply “be” with God, the Spirit enables me to go deeper.

Sisters and brothers, this is Maundy Thursday: an invitation to go deeper with the Lord. Jesus cherished his friends. Jesus loved them beyond words. He invited them to be found in him, to dwell

with him, to rediscover his spiritual presence, in the very midst of loving others and being loved by others.

This is the invitation that we receive tonight, in the silence, in the music, in the words of Scripture, in the simple repetition. Even through the burdens we carry, through our fear and anxieties, through the dangers we face, we discover profound reminders that God is with us, that Jesus Christ will never leave us alone.

Sooner or later, you and I find the One, the One of the cross of Friday and the new life of Easter. Sooner or later, you and I come face-to-face with the Lord Jesus Christ, There – right there – we discover the blessing of this holy night: Jesus loves us to the very end. He loves us to the end.