

Stay
Maundy Thursday 2021

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last year we gathered around our computers for Holy Week and said 'surely we'll be back in church by this time next year'! I found a beautiful, big, hammered copper bowl this summer for us to use for the foot-washing this year. Not yet. Not yet. We just have to wait and stay.

"Stay with me, remain with me, watch and pray" are the beautiful words of the Taize song we will sing tonight. They are Jesus' words to us from Matthew's gospel as he asks us to stay awake with him in the garden of Gethsemane. As we sing them these words become our own words as well.

We have had a lot of time this year to learn what staying means: staying put in our homes, remaining in our immediate communities and not travelling, staying with our families or with our own company during lockdown. I am so grateful for the way you have chosen to stay as a beloved church family by not only coming on Zoom but really worshipping on Zoom, praying, discussing, learning, and growing, staying with Jesus together.

As we gather tonight we are shown how the love of Jesus is "a love that stays"¹. Having loved his own, he loved them to the end, writes John. A love that having stayed through it all – suffering and death -continues to stay with us, be gifted to us, in bread and wine. We cannot, of course, celebrate the Eucharist tonight but we can gather around a shared meal and talk about what the Eucharist is and why it is so deeply central to who we are. Our first reading tells of how the people of Israel must remember, must relive, the Passover when God freed them from slavery in Egypt for the journey to the promised land. The blood of the lamb enables the angel of death to pass over them. This is the context for our understanding of the Eucharist tonight. We too must remember and, whenever we can, relive God's great act in Christ that frees us from the many things that enslave us not the least of which is death itself. The blood of the lamb allows us to pass over from death to life with him. We've been teaching our children to remember every other week when we have Table to Table Messy Church. We all bring the same snack and we remember together what we need to celebrate the Eucharist, how we do it and why we do it. They can't forget during this covid year and neither can we. For the Eucharist is the liturgical moment when Christ declares to us, through us and in us, the love that stays. It's also the declaration that, as N.T. Wright has written, "on the cross of Jesus Christ God has dealt with all that distorts and defaces human life. And this meal therefore propels us out... with the confidence that God is at work, Jesus is Lord, and the Spirit does heal and renew."²

Even when we can't celebrate the Eucharist, even when we have to stay, because we stay, we are called to be Eucharistic people and we are still sent out by God. Every interaction we have, be them few, every phone call, email, text, FaceTime, is the chance to be a witness to love that stays. As Rowan Williams has so beautifully written, may "the Spirit give us the strength to be Eucharistic signs of the love that stays- so that the whole world may know itself to be accompanied, held and treasured."³

Amen.

¹ Rowan Williams, *Candles in the Dark: Faith, hope and love in the time of pandemic*. London, SPCK: 2020. Page 9.

² N.T. Wright *Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus*. Ijamsville, The Word Among Us Press, 2007. Pages 45-46.

³ Rowan Williams, *Candles in the Dark: Faith, hope and love in the time of pandemic*. London, SPCK: 2020. Page 9.