

## Communion Meditation

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Maundy Thursday

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One of my favorite all-time writers is the late South African Alan Paton. Paton wrote passionately about his native land and the evil of apartheid – the separation of whites and blacks – that was that nation’s policy until the late 1980’s. His most popular book is probably *Cry, the Beloved Country*, but my personal favorite is another one. Its title is *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*. It’s not as easy a read as the other book, in that there is not one main character moving through the book. It is a series of reflections from different people in different levels of society and it portrays how they struggle against, cooperate with, and labor for the system of apartheid.

Several years ago, I shared with the Maundy Thursday congregation a part of that book in which the white South African judge washed the feet of his black maid during a worship service. But tonight I want to share with you another part. It involves a conversation between Robert Mansfield, the headmaster of a white high school who has just resigned because he would not back down in his desire to have his young people play a game of cricket against a squad of black South Africans; and Mr. Emmanuel Nene, an officer of the court. But Nene’s business is not professional. He says:

“I’ve come to see a man who resigns his job because he does not wish to obey an order that will prevent the children of his school from playing against the children of Mr. Nhlapo’s school. I want to see what this man looks like. We are not used to seeing such people.”

Mr. Mansfield replies, “It is not quite true that I resigned because of that order. I resigned because I think it is time to go out and fight everything that separates people from one another, and especially people of one colour and one race from people of another colour and race.”

The two men’s conversation goes on, and then they start to talk about changing political parties so that they can speak out more forcefully against apartheid. Nene starts off:

“- I understand that you are resigning to join the (Open) Party.”

“- I am not saying until I have left the service.”

“- But you must tell me. It is important to me to know. It might change my life.”

“- Yes, I am going to join the (Open) Party.”

“- I am thinking of the same thing.”

“- You’re going to wear the shining armour, too?”

“- Yes. And I’m going to get wounded also ... I don’t worry about the wounds. When I go up there, which is my intention, the Big Judge will say to me, ‘Where are your wounds?’ and if I say I haven’t any, he will say, ‘Was there nothing to fight for?’ I couldn’t face that question.”

This is a night of woundedness. Following communion we will hear about three wounded people, and we will feel their pain, because somewhere in each of their wounds are our wounds, too. They are the wounds we feel when we love someone so much that their pain becomes our pain; they are the wounds of letting someone down, someone we love deeply, of disappointing them, and feeling their forgiveness way before we have extended forgiveness toward ourselves; they are the wounds of

anger and vengeance, when the hurt we have received has overtaken us to the point where we cannot think of anything but getting even.

This is a night of woundedness, as we walk with our Lord through his dark night of betrayal and denial, and then with him out into the dark tomorrow of crucifixion. We could opt for something else; we could choose not to walk with him through this time of woundedness. It would be a lot easier. It would be easy not to feel anything, to just treat this as just another Thursday night, to go into tomorrow as just another Friday, another end of the week.

But this time of woundedness is important because it transforms all of our other days. It washes all of them from the grit and grime of hopelessness and despair, and enables us to see our lives filled with hope. It tells us in no uncertain terms that God has entered our world full of grace and truth, and that grace and truth have endured, even through crucifixion. They have endured because God took on our woundedness.

Before Jesus did that, Jesus took on something else. He picked up a towel and a basin of water, and he took on the role of a servant. It must have been mind-boggling to the disciples, to see their Lord, the One they had followed, the One who had called them, the One who had given them a new vision, to see their Lord take on the elements of a servant and wash their feet. Peter protests, like most of us would have. Why would you wash my feet, Jesus?

Because when Jesus washes our feet we can let go of our desire to dominate and control. That is a tough thing to let go of, in Peter's time and in ours. We don't want to be wounded, we don't want to open ourselves up to being hurt, we don't want someone to do something for us. If we do it ourselves we can be in control.

But as long as we lust after control we cannot follow Jesus. For Jesus is not as big on command and control as we are. Jesus gets down on all fours and washes the feet of the people who have loved and followed him, but also the people who will betray, deny and desert him. And in doing so, Jesus opens himself up to being wounded. He will be wounded by those who are closest to him, but he is doing what he is doing not to wound them, but to show them what following him really means. He is also showing them how to receive true healing from all our wounds.

In our days and in our churches we do a lot of things which take us far away from Jesus – our desires for power and control, our insatiable hunger to get our needs met, our self-absorbed passion which looks for an excuse to be hurt by others so we can lord it over them; we don't mind being wounded as long as we can get something out of it, as long as we can make someone else feel bad.

But then we see our Lord washing our feet. Then we eat with our Lord, and hear his words that in eating and drinking we are intimately connected with him for all time. Then we are wounded with Jesus, as the pains we see in the world that we know would touch him become our pain as well. And so we feed the hungry, we house the homeless, we comfort the abused, we forgive the abusers, we take on towel and basin and get to washing.

This is a night for woundedness. But this is a night to learn where that woundedness takes us – on the path of God's love for all people everywhere. May we take that path, even with our wounds. For this truly is something worth fighting for. Amen.