

## Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021. Rev. Katheryn McGinnis

During my time in seminary, I did an internship as a hospital chaplain at an urban level one trauma center in New Jersey.

During this internship, one day the hospital did a health or well-being day that was aimed towards promoting healthy self-care practices for their staff and nurses and doctors.

To promote or celebrate this day, they had different self care practices – a message table, chair yoga, snacks, and other things set up as a little fair in the hospital's atrium.

The chaplain department had a table at this fair and we offered two things:

One was a chat with a chaplain, where anyone at the fair could talk with one of us chaplains for a few minutes, maybe to vent, or maybe to ask for prayers.

And the other was a blessing of the hands. On our table we had a big clear bowl and a pitcher full of water. And we would take the person's hands, pour water over them, and then hold their hands and bless the hands that would care for so many.

To be honest, I was really nervous to do the blessing of the hands.

I thought it would be awkward to hold and pour water over strangers' hands. I hoped no one would ask for it, but a surprising number of people did. And it was kind of awkward. I would stumble over the words a bit or feel out of place holding the person's wet hands, but it was meaningful too.

And I think the reason it was both awkward and meaningful was the vulnerability it required. It's quite a vulnerable moment, to have such contact with a stranger, to hold their hands in your own and pour water over them.

Vulnerability is no stranger to us, but I think we like to choose the vulnerability we show.

What is perhaps so ironic that I was nervous to do the blessing of the hands is that my time as a chaplain in that hospital always required me to be vulnerable.

To be with a family as they watch their loved one dies requires a certain amount of vulnerability.

But I was fine with that vulnerability - I welcomed that vulnerability. Yet I pushed away the simple vulnerability to just wash a stranger's hands.

Christ takes on vulnerability when he washes the disciples' feet. He knows one of them will betray him, he knows he is about to die – yet he leans into vulnerability none the less.

He takes on the servant role, he cleans the feet of those who claim to love him but so often fail him.

Holy week, Maundy Thursday, all the days and moments that lead up to Christ crucified on the cross, require vulnerability.

Not the kind of vulnerability we choose, not vulnerability on our terms, but Christ-like vulnerability.

Vulnerability that requires us to become a servant to each other – to reverse the roles and hold someone's hands or feet in your hands and wash them clean.

In doing so, we live out the vulnerability required of us to extend Christ's body beyond ourselves. Beyond the boundaries our own chosen vulnerability.

Later on in this service we will celebrate the eucharist – and we do so not to reenact the Passover meal Christ shared with his disciples before his death, but as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet that is to come. A banquet where we break bread together – an act that requires vulnerability – for at this table, this heavenly banquet, perhaps someone who betrayed you is at the table next to you. Perhaps someone you betrayed.

The Lord's table makes room for all – which requires vulnerability. We will close the service by stripping our sanctuary bare.

We do this to acknowledge that Christ was abandoned during that night in gethsemane.

We will do so in silence.

And as the paraments begin to come down and the lights are turned off, feel the vulnerability of our bare sanctuary.

Feel the vulnerability Christ must have felt abandoned.

Feel the vulnerability it requires to face the reality that we often fail Christ.

Christ's last word in this scripture is to love one another just as he loved us.

We cannot do this without washing each other's feet. We cannot do this without vulnerability.

Amen.