“Where to, now?” - Stephanie Sorge, Maundy Thursday 2024

 The move from Maundy Thursday into Good Friday is always a jarring one. Most of us gathered here just shared a wonderful meal and fellowship, and we will soon embody the remembrance of foot washing and communion. When we leave, we will do so in silence. Though meaningful, it always feels a little awkward to leave church in silence. But once we rise from the table, there is little comfort to be found in these next few days.

 We’ve been reading through Mark’s gospel, and a couple of weeks ago came to the little apocalypse, which ends with Jesus saying to his disciples, “Keep awake.” Then, in the very next chapter what do we find, but disciples who keep falling asleep? Could they not keep awake for even an hour, when their friend Jesus clearly needs them?

 These Maundy Thursday passages give us betrayal, denial, and falling asleep on Jesus, all from those who were his closest friends. In various ways and over the course of a few short hours, Jesus is abandoned by the people he loves. In prayer, he even asks God if there is any other way, but he’s met with silence.

 Some say that Jesus’s greatest miracle was developing a close friend group in his 30s. There is some truth to that. I imagine there were a lot of times their company helped keep Jesus going, and that it was a huge comfort to have them gathered for what he knew would be his farewell dinner. Jesus was all about love and relationship - it’s the commandment to love each other that gives us the name for this service. But in the end, even his disciples dropped away.

 Last year, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released a paper entitled: “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation.”[[1]](#footnote-1) To sum it up, he writes: “Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. And the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

 Tonight I'm struck by the loneliness of these final days and hours, and how little they reflect the reality of most of Jesus’s life, ministry, and legacy. Maybe it wasn’t his suffering and death from which he wanted an out. Maybe it was the loneliness. Or the combination. Because just about everything is easier to deal with when you’re surrounded by those you love.

 So this final command to love each other is not only a summation of Jesus’s teaching, but also a warning not to neglect and lose connection and relationship with God and others. I think all of us can relate to the feeling of loneliness. For some, it has taken a huge toll that others may never know. The very nature of loneliness is that we experience it alone. We suffer in silence. But that’s not the way it has to be.

 Even in these days of waning religious affiliation, the desire for community and connection is just as high or higher than it ever has been. I hope all of us here have experienced the gift of being connected within the body of Christ. There are few places where this kind of connection can be fostered these days.

 The commandment to is love - beyond the existing bonds of relationship, beyond the boundaries of families and familiar communities - to be agents of love, connection, and reconciliation in a world that is hungry for it. We are hungry for it.

 Foot washing remains a boundary-breaking practice. Some of the most holy stories I’ve heard involve the act of washing feet. This meal that we share reminds us that this is not our table, but one to which we are invited by Jesus. And Jesus invites everyone. We’re hungry for connection, and there are others who remain hungry for connection and bread. We are thirsty for justice, and there are others who remain deprived of justice and safe water to drink. We eat here and remember that we are not alone, and as we eat, we see how many are not here, who have not heard the invitation, or do not think they belong.

So come, one and all, to receive and give love. You are not alone.

1. https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid p. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)