

## **Humbly I Adore Thee**

*April 9, 2009*

(Maundy Thursday)

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

In the Gospel of John, the writer tells us about how Jesus washed his followers feet on the night before Jesus died.

This footwashing only appears in John's Gospel and is not recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark or Luke.

And I really wanted tonight to preach about the washing of feet. However, the Holy Spirit led my heart in a different direction than the footwashing - as I focused on why this night is so meaningful to me.

For in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke,  
And in the Letter of Paul to the Corinthians,  
The focus of this night before Jesus died is not on the footwashing, but the focus is on the Last Supper.

As the Apostle Paul writes, this is the night when we remember the tradition that we have received,  
That on that night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and broke it and said,  
"Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me."

Therefore, on Maundy Thursday night, I remember.  
And last night, as my mind was flooded by remembrances of the mysterious nature of Maundy Thursday and flooded by memories of taking communion, in all times and in all places,  
I sat down at the piano at my house.

I opened up the hymnal that sits on our piano to Hymn 314, the hymn that we just sang.  
I opened up the hymnal to that hymn because, in all of the Maundy Thursday services I have been to, this hymn is almost always sung.

When I hear that haunting melody, my mind immediately thinks of this holy night, the night when Jesus said:  
“Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.”

If everyone would now reopen your hymnals to Hymn 314, I would like to reflect and remember with you.

If you will look at the bottom of this hymn, there is a notation as to who wrote the words to this hymn.

The notation says that words are attributed to Thomas Aquinas, who lived 800 years ago, in the 1200s.

Thomas Aquinas is considered one of the greatest theologians of all time.

Thomas Aquinas developed an extensive theology about all of the sacraments, especially about the mystery of the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Much of what we understand about the Lord’s Supper, about the Holy Eucharist, comes from Thomas Aquinas.

And then, below that, you can see the notation about the music.

The tune is called “Adoro devote” which comes from the Latin name for this hymn that Thomas Aquinas wrote.

Now, to the verses:

In verse 1, the hymn sings:

*Humbly I adore thee, Verity unseen,  
Who thy glory hidest ‘neath these shadows mean.*

That word, Verity, is capitalized.

Verity is another word for the Truth, with a capital T.

We are reminded that Jesus says that he is the way, the truth and the life. Therefore, we humbly adore the Truth that we cannot fully see with our eyes.

And whose glory hides beneath shadows mean.

That word ‘mean’ is an archaic usage of that word, meaning common or inferior.

Thus, the hymn sings that God's glory hides beneath our common and every day shadows.

And when I sing this hymn on Maundy Thursday, I am reminded of the shadows of this worship service, when darkness is falling.

Then, the hymn goes on:

*Lo, to thee surrendered, my whole heart is bowed.*

*Tranced as it beholds thee, shrined within the cloud.*

I really like those words 'tranced' and 'shrined within the cloud.' All of which say to me that God is a mystery, a mystery that entrances us.

On to verse 2:

*Taste and touch and vision to discern thee fail,*

*Faith, that comes by hearing, pierces through the veil.*

Four different senses are mentioned here:

Taste, touch, vision, and hearing.

And what these words say to me is that hearing is the only sense that pierces through the veil.

It is when we hear the spoken Word that we are able to get a small glimpse of God.

This is why the spoken word is so important in our worship services.

And that phrase, "pierces through the veil" always speaks to me on this night, on this night when our cross is veiled in red and soon will be veiled in black.

The hymn goes on:

*I believe whatever the Son of God hath told,*

*What the Truth hath spoken, that for truth I hold.*

This is a statement of faith, that we will internalize the spoken word of God as our own truth.

Now to verse 3:

*O memorial wondrous of the Lord's own death,  
Living Bread that givest all thy creatures breath.*

In these words, Thomas Aquinas is describing the Lord's Supper, the Holy Eucharist, in which we remember Jesus' death each time we gather to receive the living bread that changes us.

Then, the hymn sings:

*Grant my spirit ever by thy life may live,  
To my taste thy sweetness, never failing give.*

Whenever I sing that phrase about the taste of sweetness, I remember how the communion wine always tastes to me, slightly sweet. And I remember how the communion wine always smells. When I come forward to receive communion in church, the smell of the wine always reaches me just before the taste ever does. In my life, there is nothing else like that taste and that smell of the sweetness of communion.

And finally, let us sing together the last verse of the hymn:

*Jesus, whom now hidden, I by faith behold,  
What my soul doth long for, that thy word foretold.  
Face to face thy splendor, I at last shall see,  
In the glorious vision, blessed Lord, of thee.*

And in these final words, we express our hope that one day, the veil will be lifted and we will see God, not just through the dim glass of faith,

At the last, we will see God face to face.

Now whenever I sing this hauntingly beautiful ancient hymn, I am overcome with the sense that this Christian faith is all about Mystery.

The Christian faith is about a man named Jesus, who mysteriously pierces through the veil.

It is about a man named Jesus, who I meet through taste and touch and vision and smells - and through the hearing of his Word.

It is about a man named Jesus, who I meet in the mystery of his Body

and Blood.

So, remember - as the living bread melts in your mouth.  
Remember - as the sweetness of the wine touches your lips,  
Remember - that it is all a wonderful, wondrous Mystery.

AMEN.

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