

April 2, 2026—Maundy Thursday
The Rev. James Wyatt

What Love Sounds Like

I want to invite you to close your eyes for a moment and imagine a sound—I want you to imagine what love sounds like.

In Bible study on Tuesday night, we were talking about the Psalm we'll read on Sunday, Psalm 118, verse 15: "There is a sound of exultation and victory in the tents of the righteous." That line sparked a really vivid imagining for Guy, who described a scene of people gathered in tents, sharing food and laughter, with children running around and playing, and what a joyful sound would come from a scene like that. And that sparked a memory in Connie, who described participating in a three-day walk for breast cancer awareness, years ago, and how as the walkers settled in for the night, exhausted from the day's walking, the tents would buzz with the sounds of laughter as people shared their stories together. That's what I think of when I imagine what love sounds like. Can you imagine that sound?

This night, this holy night, is one of the most solemn and somber observances in the calendar of the church, commemorating the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, on "the night when he was betrayed," (1 Cor. 11:23) the night before he died. We observe it quietly, reverently, painfully aware of what tomorrow brings. But I strongly suspect that the night itself was much like any other night when Jesus ate and drank with his friends—I imagine the room filled with the sound of love. I imagine a lot of laughter as Jesus started to wash his friends' feet, along with Peter's sort of outraged, sort of embarrassed protest. The middle part of this Gospel text, in the verses we skipped over tonight, describes "the disciple ... whom Jesus loved" "reclining close to [Jesus'] heart" or "bosom." (John 13:23) My point is, look at the way this passage opens: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." This was a gathering of dear friends, intimate and at ease with each other, and any gathering like that—even on a somber occasion like a funeral—is going to sound like love.

At the end of our reading this evening—which is actually the beginning of a long "farewell discourse" in the Gospel of John as Jesus says goodbye to his dearest friends—Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." And when he says that, he has just shown them what that looks like in a concrete way: washing their feet, serving them, taking care of them. But I think there's more to it than that—loving one another looks like that whole evening, the whole supper, reclining together, eating and drinking together, laughing and telling stories, making the sound of love.

On his last night together with his friends, Jesus tells them, in effect, "keep doing this." "Do this in remembrance of me," as often as you come together and eat and drink together, remember me. Because I think he knows how much they're going to need that, when he is gone. The very next day, the violent forces of Empire are going to tear him away from them and nail him to a cross, break him the same way that Empire always tries to break the people who stand in its way. They're going to need each other to get through those next few days, they're going to need to hold on to the love they shared for each other, and the memory of how much he loved them, when the sound of love has faded from their ears.

In just the same way, we need each other, when the violent forces of Empire seem so strong, when the sound of love feels like a distant memory, when griefs and stresses and anxieties pile up and never seem to end—the way we get through all that is to love each other, to come together, eat and drink together, laugh and tell stories.

I guess I say all this because this is Holy Week—this is the most solemn, somber moment in the wheel of the Christian year. These are days when we shine a spotlight on the brutal reality of human existence—the suffering and violence and grief that are part and parcel of being alive. And I want us to remember in the midst of all that, that as we grieve for Jesus and as we grieve for all the brokenness in our own lives, we grieve together. Tonight we wash each other's feet in love, because tomorrow we will need each other. Tonight we eat and drink

together because tomorrow we will weep together. Tonight, and tomorrow, and always, we love each other, and that's how we get through this—this Holy Week, and this life.
Amen.