



Sermon for Maundy Thursday  
Rev. Jonathan Stepp  
April 18, 2019  
John 13.1-17, 31b-35

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I think most of us watched in horror at the pictures from Paris on Monday as Notre Dame burned. The good news, if there is any, is that it could have been so much worse. Much was lost but the rose window survived, as did the walls and towers and organ. We can be thankful this Holy Week that something beautiful and priceless was not taken from us entirely even though it was tragically damaged.

A fire that badly damages the place of worship is a nightmare for any parish, even if the building isn't world heritage site. In the last month three historically African-American churches in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, were burned down by an arson. A 21 year-old man has been charged with the crime. The good news there, if there is any, is that a gofundme set up to help those churches rebuild had raised only \$50,000 as of this past Sunday but by yesterday, after we all witnessed the tragedy in Paris, that gofundme was up to \$1 million.

It is often said but it bears repeating, as we begin our Paschal Triduum in the shadow of these tragedies, that the Church is not a building. The Church is a spiritual family of people gathered around Jesus Christ. We see that very clearly in our gospel text for this Maundy Thursday. We see Jesus gathered with his spiritual family for a last supper on the night before his crucifixion. A tragic loss much greater than the burning of a building is about to engulf that small community of disciples: they will not lose their place of worship, rather, they will lose the one who is their leader, their teacher, and their friend.

Because we know how this story is going to work out in three days, with Jesus' resurrection, we could be tempted to pass too quickly over the tragedy that spiritual family experienced on that first Good Friday. The one they had believed was the savior of their nation and people was brutally killed before their very eyes. For those three days it seemed like the world had ended.

And in a sense, even though Jesus would rise from the dead, an old world had ended. Jesus came back to them but he was changed and so were their lives. Changed for the better, of course, but still different, still something new that was unlike what had gone before. That night in the upper room, when he washed their feet and shared the bread and wine with them, was the last time that they would be together in exactly that way.

As he rose from the grave, so Notre Dame and the churches of Louisiana will no doubt rise from the ashes of their tragedy – the buildings will come back but they will be changed, and perhaps they will be changed for the better, but the old way of living will not longer exist in quite the same way that it did.

What doesn't change, though, is the love that our spiritual family has for each other. That's the note on which our text ends this evening and it is the note on which we enter into the ceremony of washing each other's feet. Jesus says "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The world will know we are part of the Jesus movement because the Church isn't a building, it's a spiritual family where people love one another, where people place Christ at the center of all we are and all we do, and where we love each other enough to stoop down in humility, in imitation of our Savior, to wash one another's feet.

Amen.