

Maundy Thursday, 2011.

Scripture: John 13:1-17

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell

you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Sermon: "Done Too Soon?"

Introduction:

Neda Agha-Soltan was born on January 23, 1983 in Tehran, Iran. She was an aspiring singer and instrumentalist of Persian music. She worked in her families travel agency. She was engaged to a photojournalist also working in Tehran.

On June 20, 2009 at 7:05pm, she stood watching protests against the election of President Ahmadinajad. She was shot in the chest and died two minutes later.

She was 26 years old.

She was "Done too soon."

Heath Ledger was born on April 4, 1979 in Perth, Western Australia. He moved to the United States after developing a career as an actor in Australian TV and film. He quickly developed a resume of roles in 19 films. He produced and directed music videos. He aspired to be a film director.

On January 22, 2008 he went to sleep, after taking a combination of prescription drugs ,and he never woke up again.

He was 28 years old.

He was "Done too soon."

We remember people who die young. When we think about their death we really feel it inside. We experience a sadness that is hard to define. A sadness that overflows beyond thoughts of their death to thoughts of our own death. A sadness that overflows beyond thoughts of our own death

to thoughts about human death in general. We say, "They had so much life to live!" But in saying this we are really asking questions about the point of human life. What does it all mean?

Jesus Christ was born over 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem. He had a charisma combined with an unusual way of looking at things that drew crowds. He quickly built a core group of 12 and like the prophets of old, set out to challenge the establishment of his day.

But after a trip into Jerusalem, the crowd turned on him. He was betrayed. He was arrested and beaten. He was crucified.

According to scholars he was about 33 years old.

But was he "done too soon"?

The stories of his last days, like the last supper, for example, have been told and retold to every generation of human beings since his death on the cross. Somehow, these stories don't leave people despairing about life. Somehow they take people through the questions of the meaning of life to meaning and hope.

What was it about Jesus' early death that makes his story so full of meaning? What did he know about living that makes the shortness of his life, while tragic, so full of hope?

And how can we live our life so that, no matter how much longer we have, our death will strengthen and encourage the people we leave behind?

In our story tonight the table was set. Not just the table for the Passover meal. The table was set for the end of Jesus' life.

And Jesus knew it.

John 13:1 says, "It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father."

As they ate their passover meal together, Judas, one of the 12 disciples, was already committed to betraying Jesus.

Verse 2 says: "The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus."

Soon Judas would lead the authorities to Jesus so they could arrest him.

And Jesus knew it.

Soon he would walk the path to Golgatha, to "the place of the skull" where he would be nailed to a cross until he died.

And Jesus knew it.

The table was set, not just for the passover meal, but for the end of Jesus' life.

What would you do if you knew your death was near?

Would you do those things you have always wanted to do but have never taken the time to do them? Would you begin to wonder what your life has been about? Would you question its meaning? Would you get angry with God for how unfair it is that your days are already coming to an end?

John 13:1 reads: "It was just before the passover festival. Jesus knew the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were with them in the world, he loved them to the end."

What would you do if you knew your death was near?

Jesus took the knowledge of his premature death and went deeper in his expression of love.

John 13:4 ff

"...(Jesus) got up from the meal,  
took off his outer clothing,  
and wrapped a towel around his waist."

"After that,  
he poured water into a basin  
and began to wash his disciples feet,  
drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

Jesus took the knowledge of his premature death and went deeper into the expression of love.

"Having loved his own in the world, he loved them...to the end."

Friedrich Nietzsche had a problem with these acts of love. He saw Christianity as "servile mediocrity". Love in the Bible "sides with everything weak, low and botched; it has made an ideal out of antagonism towards strong life...the will to nothingness sanctified." He blames Christianity for changing all of the values of the Germanic peoples; making a strong people and a strong culture weak.

Nietzsche was interested, not in love, but in power. He to revive his people's will to power.

We all have an inner Nietzsche. We often try to distance ourselves from such a view. We would never "say" that kind of thing about Jesus or his love. But, spoken or not, there is a little Nietzsche inside of all of us. We all have a "will to power"

Peter had the will to power.

"Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'"

"Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'"

"No, said Peter, 'You shall never wash my feet.'"

Peter had given his life for Jesus. He had left his career as a fisherman behind. He had seen Jesus develop an influential movement among his people. He stood with Jesus against corruption in their society. He had given his life to see Jesus succeed. Together they had done it. Jesus had

gained influence, Jesus had gained power.

But how does he use this power? To dress like a servant and to wash the dirty feet of his followers? This is not the appropriate use of power!

If Jesus wants to take over the Temple, fine, Peter is there. If Jesus wants to continue to fight injustice, Peter will suffer with him. If Jesus wants to really make something of this opportunity Peter will help him to become even greater.

But to become smaller? Certainly not!

Peter had a will to power...a desire for success in his life, which meant success for Jesus. And his will for power made it difficult for him to receive the love of Jesus.

Jesus has power. What does it say in verse 3?

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power..."

Jesus has power. But his power is not something he wields over others so that he can increase his success. And when we give our lives over to him he does not use his power to increase our success. Jesus isn't interested in the "will to power" for himself. He doesn't come into our lives to satisfy our will to power either.

If we don't understand this we won't be able to receive his love.

Jesus' uses his power to serve others.

John 13:12b

"Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked (the disciples).

You call me Teacher and Lord and rightly so for that is what I am."

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you would also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (v. 14)

Jesus uses his power, not to assert himself over us, but to lay down his life on our behalf. And he wants us to lay down our lives for others.

Implications:

Jesus' last words on the cross in John's gospel are: "It is finished." With that his short life was over. But it seems that somehow, in some way, Jesus' short life was a complete life. "It is finished" he said and then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus' life was about giving himself away for others. This is the only way his final words make sense. If his life was about his resume then "It is finished" makes no sense. His movement grew and then rejected him in a matter of years. When he died, the Jewish leaders he criticized were still in power. The Romans who oppressed his people were still oppressing his people. If his life was about the will to power, then "It is finished" makes no sense.

But if Jesus' life was about giving himself away for the sake of others, "It is finished" makes complete sense. He built a movement. He shared his life with them. He was abandoned by the movement. He did not run or seek revenge, but allowed arrest, was beaten and died. He gave, not only his life, but even his death. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." If giving away is the focus of his life then, yes, on the cross, it was finished.

This is what makes Jesus' early death so hopeful for us. His life was not about getting more for himself, it was about giving himself away. He was able to completely fulfill his life in 33 years.

It is finished.

Application:

Jesus' life and death is a guide for us in our own life and death.

"vs. 15: I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Human life is not about achieving things for ourselves. Human life is about giving our lives away.

vs. 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

This is why we exist. This is why we were created. This is how we make sense of our lives however long they last...by giving ourselves for others.

vs. 17 "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Brothers and sisters, give your life away.