

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“Now I Get It”**

John 13:1 – 17, 31b – 35

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 2015

There’s a scene in the movie, “The Godfather,” which takes place shortly after the death of the mobster, and family patriarch, Vito Corleone. Vito’s son, Michael, is in the process of taking over leadership of the organization... and, as he describes it, “settling all family business.”

In the scene, two of the Corleone family lieutenants, Clemenza and Tessio are present; and they’re pleading with Michael for permission to move in on territory currently under the control of various other mafia families. They’re afraid that, if they don’t act soon, their own criminal empire may be put in serious jeopardy. But Michael tells them to wait, because he has knowledge of events taking place of which Clemenza and Tessio are unaware; events which will positively affect the fortunes of the whole Corleone family... including both of them.

The two lieutenants can see just a part of the overall picture, so they don’t understand what’s really going on... consequently, they’re worried about the future. But Michael *can* see the whole big picture, and he does understand what’s happening; so he tells Clemenza and Tessio to be patient... that things are in the works “*which will answer all your questions, and solve all your problems.*” And, in the meantime, all they have to do is trust that Michael is working things out in a way that will be to everyone’s advantage.

Now, this scene, from one of the great motion pictures of all-time, beautifully illustrates the state of affairs at the Last Supper... as described by John in our gospel lesson for this evening. Not that Jesus and His disciples were some kind of organized crime family! Of course not! But that, in the matter of bringing the kingdom of God, and the salvation of God, to complete fruition on this earth... there was a lot which, at the time of the Last Supper, the disciples didn’t yet understand.

Jesus understood it all, of course, because He could see the whole big picture. But the disciples’ view of things was limited... faulty... incomplete. They were bound by expectations, hundreds of years in the making, of what the Messiah would do, and how the Messiah would act... expectations which Jesus seemed bound and determined *not* to fulfill.

Such as the business of going around the room and washing the disciples’ feet... an act to which Peter reacted with slack-jawed horror. Foot-washing was for slaves, not rabbis... and certainly not for any candidate for Messiah-ship. Yet, there Jesus was... with a towel around His waist, happily handling a roomful of filthy feet. It was something that seemed as un-Messianic as touching lepers, and dining with prostitutes, and calling a tax-collector to be a disciple. It was the kind of thing which, from the limited point of view of Peter and James and the rest, made Jesus appear to be moving in a different direction altogether.

So there was a lot of fear, and worry, and desperation in the hearts of those disciples; and when, after washing their feet, Jesus asked them, “*Do you understand what I have done for you?*”

to a man they would have answered, “*No! We don’t understand anything you’re doing right now!*” And, in the hours ahead, that lack of understanding would only increase; as Jesus was betrayed, arrested, beaten up, crucified, and killed.

Make no mistake: as the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday unfolded before those disciples’ eyes, it was simply beyond their limited human ability to comprehend, and understand... they simply weren’t able to “get it.” But Jesus, with His words in our text tonight, and elsewhere throughout the gospels, was giving His friends His reassurance that, as in the scene from the movie, there were things going on which they couldn’t yet see, that would “*answer all their questions, and solve all their problems.*” And if they could just hang in there a little bit longer, and continue to trust Him, they would, eventually, “get it...” and everything they were seeing and hearing would finally make sense.

And, as we know, after the glorious events of Easter morning, when Jesus presented Himself alive again, outside the tomb... the disciples *did* begin to “get it;” they did begin to understand what Jesus’ mission and ministry were really all about; and they did move forward in their own ministry, which would change the world in His name. But that night? At the Last Supper? The moment that we commemorate here, with this service? At that point, the disciples were still in the dark; still grasping at shadows; still trying to make sense, any sense, of what was going on.

I think that this is an important message for us to hear on Maundy Thursday... this lesson about the disciples’ very partial understanding of the way in which Jesus was fulfilling His Messianic mission.

I think it’s helpful for us to remember that, at the time that Jesus was actually doing His work of ministry... His closest friends and followers didn’t always “get it,” they weren’t always on the same page that He was on, as He did the job of bringing God’s kingdom to this world.

I think it’s good for us to be reminded that, even Jesus’ inner circle had their doubts, and their fears, and their questions about the whole gospel enterprise; and that they, at times, had to trust that their Lord was working things out in ways that they couldn’t perceive at that moment... but that, in the end, they would see and understand clearly.

All of this is important for us, because, like the disciples themselves, we, too, have to trust that Jesus is taking care of business in ways that just aren’t apparent to us sometimes. We, in our own life of Christian faith, have to take Jesus at His word... and keep our hope alive, even when Jesus seems to be leading us in directions that don’t make very much sense. We have to accept the fact that, like those disciples in that upper room, we don’t always “get” what Jesus is up to; that our limited, earthbound perspective simply won’t allow us to see the whole big picture that is our Heavenly Father’s perspective.

We walk, day by day, in the footsteps of those first disciples; and sometimes that’s discouraging. But as we are reminded, in our text this evening, and in the events of Good Friday and Easter to come... our efforts are not in vain! Because Jesus *is* up to more than we can see with our eyes, or touch with our hands. His love *does* remain with us, even when we feel like giving up and running away. And in the light of that wonderfully empty tomb, we *can* begin to “get it,” and realize that there’s no power in heaven or earth that can take away the hope we have in Jesus’ resurrection. That’s the message that Jesus was trying to get across, to His friends and disciples on Maundy Thursday. And that’s the message that He’s trying to get across to you and me tonight.

May we truly hear that awesome message... and know that, even if we don't always understand exactly what's going on in our life, or in our world, our Lord certainly does. And He has promised that, if we will only trust Him, and follow Him, He will lead us all to exactly where we're supposed to be!

May that be our hope, and may that be our life. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.