**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**April 14th, 2022**

**Love to the Last Breath**

**Maundy Thursday**

**Reflection**

1. Passion

As we hear the familiar words from the Passion story tonight,

there are a few key phrases and scenes that come to mind when I think about this act of salvation. I consider the taunts and jeers of a crowd yelling, “Crucify Him!” and they do not seem to shake from those cutting words. I think about the crowd who will not let Pilate release Jesus, the ones who for seemingly no sensible reason feel continually compelled to bring Jesus to the cross. I wonder about the folks who would mock and harass Jesus, claiming he should get himself off the cross if he’s the Son of God. I look at the soldiers who give Jesus sour wine, a last bitter note, to send Christ into those final moments.

 What I cannot possibly understand is after all this, after all of this harassment, cruelty, and agony, is how Jesus still departs in love. Even after all this, he still utters the words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Thank God that Jesus is Jesus and I am not, for I’m pretty sure those are not the words that would leave my mouth.

 Those last words, that last breath, are true signs of the undeniable and unfathomable love of God. When I question God’s love, perhaps these are the words to return to, the scenes to remember, because there is no greater love than this.

 What does love at the last breath have to teach us about God, about this life we live, and how we are to live within it? At the root, it teaches us that despite the stories we hear in the Old Testament and narratives, where we can see a God who seems mean, vengeful, or terse, we are reminded here that at the very heart of God is love. It can be hard to see God’s love in some of those places and it can be hard to see God’s love in our lives sometimes, but ultimately, in the act of salvation, we find that love is the core of who God is and who God calls us to be.

 While I can’t understand on a human level why God would still love us despite all of this trash talking and toxicity, the fact is, God does. I know that if I am called to walk in the steps of Jesus and to be a disciple that reflects his ways, my way has to be one of love. This is sometimes easier said than in practice. When the world seems dark, when there’s taunts and jeers and it seems like all too much – Christ calls me, and calls us, not to simply accept the pain, but to respond so counterintuitively with love that it catches people off guard.

 As you listen to the story tonight, remember those words, those challenging and harmful words that humans keep on hitting Jesus with. And then remember, above all, above any of these words, those last words, that last breath – the one that ushers in love for a bunch of humans who don’t deserve it. May that love reside with you as you wait in the darkness, as you hold your breath, for a new day to dawn and a brighter morning to come. Amen.