

# Maundy Thursday

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**John Wilkinson**  
**Third Presbyterian Church**  
**April 14, 2017**

We have been listening to the “Hamilton” soundtrack in our house. In the second act, we hear a haunting song called “It’s Quiet Uptown,” sung by Alexander Hamilton and two of the Schuyler sisters.

Angelica sings:

“There are moments that the words don’t reach  
There is suffering too terrible to name  
You hold your child as tight as you can  
And push away the unimaginable  
The moments when you’re in so deep  
It feels easier to just swim down...”

And that word, “unimaginable,” persists, sung time after time, a chant, a prayer. What is unimaginable here is that Alexander’s and Elizabeth’s son, Philip, has been killed in a duel, a senseless death.

Angelica, Eliza’s sister, continues singing:

“There are moments that the words don’t reach  
There is a grace too powerful to name  
We push away what we can never understand  
We push away the unimaginable...”

Then the company concludes:

“Forgiveness. Can you imagine?  
If you see him in the street, walking by her  
Side, talking by her side, have pity  
They are going through the unimaginable...”

At differing times during the day the sun will stream through the windows in this room, and I will come in and sit for a bit. These six windows (<http://thirdpresbyterian.org/worship/archive/windows/warmemorials.html>) were dedicated on January 1, 1922, five years after the conclusion of World War I, whose end came a century ago this week. In their own way they give beautiful and silent testimony to the unimaginable. The unimaginable nature of a world at war, of so many dead, with technical advances only multiplying the brutality, multiplied brutality evidenced again this very day. The windows include symbols of the allies – England, Belgium, Ireland, Canada, Italy, Scotland, Japan, Greece, France.

What is always poignant to me is the plaque underneath. The windows were given in memory of five young men from this church, aged 22 to 27, who died in World War I: Lt. Harvey L. Cory, Lt. William L. Magill, Lt. Henry O. Sommer, Lt. Frank M. Stewart, Lt. Chauncey T. Young.

The unimaginability of war, of young lives lost, of families grieving, descendants, perhaps, grieving still, of our predecessors gathered in this very space nearly a century ago to remember, to sing and pray, to do what we do this night.

This is – or should be – an unimaginable night. The young man whose table invitation we accept, preaching hope and love, justice and reconciliation, welcoming all, widening the circle, healing, feeding. He is first betrayed. Then he will be convicted in a shameful farce. Then he will be executed, “unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,” our creed teaches us. Unimaginable. And yet it happened. That is what we remember this night, and tomorrow at noontime.

And the unimaginable things continue: in Stockholm and Syria, in Germany and Egypt.

And more personally, and intimately. A cancer diagnosis. An unexpected job loss. The end of a marriage. A fading parent. A child lost in an accident.

Whether in the history books or the world stage or our own hearts and spirits, the unimaginable happens and causes trauma and grief and there are moments that the words don't reach.

So this is our job. To gather. To remember. To name our own grief and trauma and to journey in solidarity with all who suffer, in whatever way.

And this is our job as well. To continue to break bread and pour the cup, because by remembering this meal we empower and are empowered.

And this, too, is our job. Never to allow the unimaginable to become the imaginable. Never to allow warfare, or acts of violence, or brokenness, or the narrative of our personal struggles, to become the acceptable status quo.

We who gather here tonight at the beginning of the story know its full arc and its final act. We who gather here tonight do so with a spirit of prophetic imagination, to use Walter Brueggemann's term, to imagine a table where all are welcome, to imagine a life lived with tears no more, to imagine a peaceable kingdom, to imagine reconciliation.

To get there, we begin with the unimaginable. Then we imagine, with urgency and hope. We start here, with a grace too powerful to name...