

“Casablanca”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
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Maundy Thr.

John 13:31-35

[Jesus said,]

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;  
even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ”

John 13:34

Let us pray... O God,

Teach us to choose to do what is most loving in the choices we must make in our lives.

Help us to recognize our options and take into account the greater good,  
but not to forget that we count, too.

Amen

Tonight, we commemorate the Last Supper –  
when Jesus introduced a new tradition based on  
the Jewish Passover meal called the Seder.

Passover recalls how the Hebrew people were rescued  
from oppression in Egypt when God sent Moses  
to confront pharaoh with warnings and afflictions and  
lead them as refugees through deep water and empty desert  
to a promised land.

The last of those warnings and afflictions was the death of the Egyptians’ first born –  
which finally broke pharaoh’s resolve.

And we commemorate the death of Jesus – whom we call the Son of God,  
as a sacrifice he chose to make for the sake of all humanity.

The events of the Passover are told  
and ritually re-enacted throughout the Seder meal.

This is a story that has literally been handed down from generation to generation  
for centuries – a story that never gets old with each retelling.

The same is true for us and our tradition of Holy Communion.

Movies are a form that storytelling takes in our culture  
and they are certainly meant to be entertaining,  
but have also served our society as a source of shared parables  
that help teach values.

Not all those values are good and they can seem dated or just irrelevant,  
but there are some films that have achieved a timeless quality  
like those sacred stories that can be told and retold.

And one of the greatest stories on film is “Casablanca”.

Willard, p.2

Now, I expect most of you know the story of “Casablanca” –

Like the ancient Israelites escaping from Pharaoh’s slavery,  
European refugees fled from Hitler’s tyranny,  
making their way to the north African city of Casablanca  
in the hopes of getting an airplane out to Lisbon and beyond  
to the Promised Land of America.

In 1941, Casablanca was under the neutral jurisdiction of the French,  
but controlled by Nazi Germany.

Travel visas were a precious commodity on the black market there –  
and the story of “Casablanca” begins as the ‘usual suspects’ are rounded up  
after German couriers were murdered for  
special ‘letters of transit’ that could not be revoked.

Ex-patriate Rick Blaine runs a nightspot that caters to a cosmopolitan mix  
of people waiting, waiting, waiting to get out of Casablanca.

We learn that Rick had been a freedom fighter in Ethiopia and Spain,  
but now is the cynical owner of a café on the edge of the world.

But life gets complicated for him again when a black marketeer  
gives those prized letters of transit to Rick.

Victor Laszlo – a principal leader of the resistance movement against the Nazis  
had come to Rick’s hoping to get those visas  
for himself & his wife Ilsa to escape to America.

And as you may know, Rick & Ilsa had an affair years ago in Paris –  
till she disappeared – with only a note to say she could never see him again.

She had thought her husband had died,  
but when she found him alive – sick and in hiding, she had to leave Rick  
and that broke Rick’s heart.

Rick was now faced with two choices:

Provide Laszlo & Ilsa with the letters of transit  
or betray Laszlo to the authorities and escape with Ilsa.

Many quotes from the film are very familiar – though no one ever said,  
*‘Play it again, Sam.’*

Humphrey Bogart as ‘Rick’ did say,

*‘Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine...’*

But right before that, he said,

*‘If it’s December 1941 in Casablanca, what time is it in New York?*

*I’ll bet they’re asleep in New York. I’ll bet they’re asleep all over America...’*

Willard, p.3

“Casablanca” was filmed in 1942 and hearing the phrase ‘December 1941’,  
would evoke the same feeling for American moviegoers  
as hearing ‘September 2001’ – or ‘9/11’ these days.  
And by then, the United States was already in the war against Japan and Germany.

The film’s message is basically about the choices we must make between  
personal happiness and devotion to a cause greater than oneself.  
At that point in history, it was affirming a decision America had already made  
though it was still early in World War II and terrible sacrifices  
were yet to be made by American families.

What gives this film such a powerful context is that many of the actors  
were refugees themselves – even the actor who played the “bad guy”  
Gestapo chief Major Strasser.

Conrad Vieth also had to flee Germany to save his wife who was Jewish.

In the film, they were talking about sacrifices to be made in a world at war –  
but in our lesson from the Gospel of John, Jesus was talking about  
the transformation of the world itself through love.

Christ had faced such a decision and his disciples were being challenged  
to prepare to do the same.

And so are we – just like each generation of Christians ever since.

Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin word, ‘mandatum’ –  
meaning ‘commandment’ as a reference to Jesus’ new  
commandment to the disciples, ‘Love one another’.

Both “Casablanca” and the Gospel are enduring love stories  
that call people of goodwill into action.

In the final scene, Rick says,

*‘Where I’m going, you can’t follow.’*

echoing what Jesus said about the unique role he had to play  
in the great romance of the Christian story.

And Laszlo said to Rick,

*‘Welcome back to the fight.’*

*You must remember this: A kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh.*

*The fundamental things apply as time goes by...*

*It’s still the same old story; A fight for love and glory, a case of do or die.*

*The world will always welcome lovers as time goes by.*

*Oh yes, the world will always welcome lovers as time goes by.*

Amen

## John 13:31-35

13[31] When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified;

[32] if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

[33] Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'

[34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

[35] By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

## Inspired by John 13:31-35

After Judas had left, Jesus said,

"Now, it is in motion

for the Son of Man – the True Heir of Humanity,  
to be proven worthy and through whom  
God will be blessed.

If God is blessed because of him,  
God will also bless him – it's already so.

My dear ones, I am still with you,  
but soon you will be looking for me.

And as I told the Judeans,  
'Where I am going no one can follow.'

So, I am giving you a new 'commandment' –  
Love one another.

The way I have shown love to you  
is the way you should *love one another*.

In this way, everyone will know  
you are one of my followers –  
that is, if you love one another."