

Maundy Thursday
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

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As Jesus and the disciples come together to eat the Passover meal let's think about how we all enjoy inviting friends and family to our homes and serving as hosts, and preparing special food for others. We're willing to cook and clean, and wash the dishes later, just for the joy of serving as host. When it is a special holiday occasion, like this weekend, it's even better. And when the guests are close friends, or a very important person in our lives, that's when we are most happy to serve! But we probably draw the line at washing the feet of our guests, or acting too much like a servant! We want our guests to know that we are the "hosts", that we are not just the cooks and kitchen help. We would never kneel before our guests, remove their shoes or sandals, and wash their feet with our own hands. But this is exactly what Jesus did when He shared His last supper with his friends, the disciples.¹

On that night, Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world. So, He gathered with His disciples to share one last meal with them. At some point during this meal, Jesus got up from the table, tied a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet. He knelt before each of them as He washed their feet, and dried them with the towel, it was the task of a servant or a slave, not the host to wash the feet of the guests but Jesus washed all their feet, even those of Judas, the one who would betray Him that night. Christ knelt as a servant and washed the disciple's dirty, callused, and I'm sure smelly feet. He told them that they too are to be servants to each other and to others. Christ had given them an example just as He gives us one today.

Today Pope Francis went to a maximum-security prison to celebrate Maundy Thursday with the inmates and wash their feet. After Pope Francis finished his homily he put a towel around his waist went down to where the prisoners were and knelt in front of each one and washed and kissed their feet.

In an interview, he said even the Pope must serve society's marginalized and give them hope. Francis said his emphasis on reaching out to inmates comes from his heart, as well as the biblical imperative to visit prisoners and accompany the least of society. He said, "When I'm looking at a prisoner, I ask myself: 'Why him and not me?'" "Why did he fall and not me? It's a mystery that brings me closer to them."²

Jesus turned the world of His disciple's upside down that night. Tonight, the teacher and master had chosen freely to serve his students, washing their feet like a common household servant or slave. And by the end of the next day, He would have suffered the humiliation of a common slave by dying on a cross – a death that He chose freely for the sake of the world.

So, how about us “modern day disciples”? Can we do more than “go through the motions” of Holy Week, or just repeat the same old ancient customs every year? Can we see beyond the palm branches, the mournful Holy Week hymns, the liturgies and the candles, to find Jesus upsetting our tables in the Temple, and turning our whole world upside down? Can we look further than our Easter dinner tables, Easter eggs and ham, to see the feast of love that Jesus started with a simple sharing of a cup of wine and a loaf of bread?

As we have our foot washing service tonight let us picture Jesus being the one wrapping a towel around himself and kneeling to wash our feet. He performs the act of the host and the servant at once by washing our feet. He crosses all boundaries, all expectations, and all assumptions when He picks up that bowl of water and brings it to our feet. Jesus invites us so He can serve us.

In the same way, Christ is serving and taking care of us, He is tending to our wounds, our wearied spirit, our heavy sighs and our fallen hopes. As the water washes over our feet, the cleansing act of the cross also washes over us. It is a new thing that Christ is doing; a new relationship with God. Christ isn't just asking us to stand with Him, Christ isn't just asking us to walk with Him Christ is asking us to be served by Him. In being served by Him, we draw closer to Him in being served by Him we become intimate with Him.³

In Jesus' act of washing our feet Jesus is creating the church and He leaves us with a challenge, He leaves us with a blueprint for the church; this fellowship right here, right now at the Alter is to be a place where we are served and where we can serve. We are invited to serve each other and in serving we need to keep our eyes open to each other's pain and trembling. We need to take risks with each other and share our own needs and our trembling. Look in each other's eyes and take the open hand, allow you to be served, to be helped and cared for by each other.

As we come to the table tonight for Eucharist, for the bread and wine that Christ shared one last time with His disciples know that no one is alone, no one is isolated and no one eats alone.

At this table, we will have a taste of Christ's salvation. In the symbolism of communion, we hold in our hands not only the past, but also the present and the future. We transcend time for one moment, for the bread and the wine remind us of the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. In a sense, at communion we hold Christ close; in taking the bread and the wine to our lips, we have kissed the Christ child, we taste His forgiveness and salvation, and with our words and songs and prayers we have caressed his

presence. Having tasted this forgiveness, we prepare to depart from our Lord's house in peace. But our Lord is not through with us. He prepares us for departure from His house by once again placing His holy name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on us, presenting Himself to us once again, making His face shine upon us and being gracious to us, lifting His countenance upon us and giving us peace.

What Jesus did at the Last Supper, what Pope Francis did today with the inmates, and what we did here tonight are the examples we should follow and take out to the world and to each other.

When I dismiss you at the end of future services I will now be adding an extra line when I say, "This service has just ended but your service has just begun, go in peace to love and serve the Lord, and each other.

Amen