

Commanded to Love Maundy Thursday/Hand Washing/Communion April 6, 2023

John 13:1-10

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.

And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

Hand Washing...

John 13:12-17

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you

also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them...

Homily 1 – Commanded to Love, Part 1



“Maundy” comes from the Latin word for ‘commandment.’

The commandment comes from the end of tonight’s passage, from John 13:34. It is the command to love one another as

Christ first loved us. In the act of washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus demonstrated what this can look like when lived out. It is loving through acts of service, through things we can do for one another. When we choose to love as Jesus first loved us, then we discover that we are merely conduits for something that comes from beyond us. Maybe a few of you experienced that as you washed another’s hands or maybe you felt it as another washed your hands.

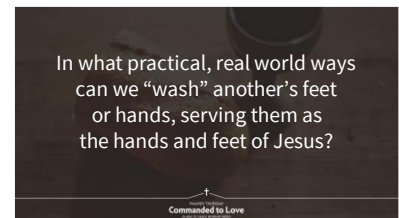
The command to love one another as Christ first loved us is a command to enter into a way of living in community that is different than the ways of the world. It is a command to interact with that world in a way that reflects love and grace. I cannot help but wonder what was going through Jesus’ mind as he got up and took off his outer clothing, as he grabbed the basin and the towel. Perhaps he thought, “If I show them what I mean, maybe they’ll finally get it.” But in the minds of the disciples, this foot washing was a demeaning thing to do. It was below even these fishermen and that tax collector. That is why Jesus has to ask: *“Do you know what I have done to you?”*



For Jesus, this was an opportunity to be who he came to be. This act of service was a powerful demonstration of what it meant to be a humble servant leader. To drive his point home, Jesus then said, *“So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”* Jesus is saying essentially, now go and do likewise.



Today, washing someone’s feet is pretty impractical in real life. That is where we are called to humble service. I invite you to take a moment or two at your tables to share your thoughts on this question: In what practical, real world ways can we “wash” another’s feet or hands, serving them as the hands and feet of Jesus?



We began tonight with a reading from Exodus 12. These instructions connect us to this night when Jesus offered the bread and the cup to the disciples. The blood spread on the doorposts and lintels of their homes came from the sacrificial lamb. The angel of death would see the blood and pass over their home. The blood of Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, protects us from the power of sin and death. These pass over us as we stand protected in the blood of Jesus. The unleavened bread symbolized that they made their exodus in haste. There was no time to let the yeast rise. This common bread of the table would be what Jesus took and broke, symbolizing what he gave for us.

We also read from Matthew 26. Here we find the words of instruction that Jesus used for that first holy communion. It is the first day of the Passover, the night that the Jews celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here Christ takes a ritual that has been celebrated from thousands of years without fail, and he gives it new meaning.

When Jesus said, *“Take, eat... drink from it...”* he was looking forward to the next day when his body would be broken, when his blood would be spilled. And then Jesus spoke these words that give the whole sacrament its meaning: *“poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* Jesus’ life will be poured out – poured out so that my sins, your sins, all of the world’s sins could be forgiven. This too was an act of humble service. This gift and this act is what we celebrate as we turn to this time of holy communion.

Holy Communion...

John 13:34-35

³⁴*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* ³⁵*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Homily 2 – Commanded to Love, Part 2



This passage follows Jesus asking, *“Do you know what I have done for you?”* In the verses that fall in between what we read tonight, Jesus predicts Judas’ betrayal and then he predicts Peter’s denial. Heads spinning from the foot washing and these bombs that he dropped, Jesus centers the disciples with this new command to love one another. The command is elevated when Jesus adds, *“as I have loved you.”* Jesus has acted out what this means. By serving, by getting on his knees, by doing something that all twelve thought well below them, he demonstrated what *“Just as I have loved you”* really meant.



My friends, this “loving as I have loved you” thing wasn’t supposed to be a ritual that Jesus’ followers practiced once a year like the Jews practiced Passover. It is supposed to be a way of life. And really, when we get down to brass tacks, the command is to be willing to serve. On Thursday. Or on Monday. Or any day. Sometimes it is a good day or a good time to serve. Sometimes serving others brings us joy – as it did when we washed one another’s hands earlier. But sometimes it is hard. Sometimes it is challenging. Sometimes the call to serve is downright inconvenient. And sometimes it does not turn out how we hoped. Once in a while our service is not received as it was intended.

So maybe on these days when it is hard or when things go awry, our inclination is to stop, to quit trying to serve others. It is then that we must remember that every day is a holy day, that every day is an opportunity to wrap a towel around our waist or to grab the snow shovel or to take the hard walk next door. Maundy, the command, is to love as we have been loved. It is not always easy for Jesus to love us, you know? Yet he does anyway – without fail, every day, day in and day out. In turn, may we too seek to love all as Jesus first loved us. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When has an act of service that you have received led to a growth in your faith? Did this, in turn, lead you to serve another?
- 2) *Pray*. When has an attempt to serve another turned out bad or been rebuffed? Pray for guidance on how to approach this situation another way.
- 3) *Study*. Read John 15:5-17. How does this passage empower you and reinforce Jesus’ command to “love as I have loved you?”