

**Do You Know What I Have Done?**

Maundy Thursday

April 14, 2022

John 13: 1-17 and 31b-35

<sup>1</sup> Now 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. <sup>2</sup> The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup> Then 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. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" <sup>10</sup> Jesus 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." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

<sup>12</sup> After 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?" <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If

*you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. <sup>18</sup>I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, ‘The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’*

*<sup>31</sup>When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup>Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

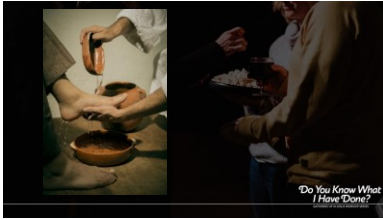


As we begin this time together this evening, a few questions for you: What is the worst job you ever had to do? Clean out the outhouse? Scrub out the garbage can? Change another's bandages? Was it something else?

When I was about 24, I took a job at a 4-H farm in Bloomington, Connecticut. I was working on my master's degree in Elementary Education, and I took a position as the education director. Groups would come out to the farm, and we'd learn about the process of growing food, milking cows, feeding pigs, and so on. We would take a hay ride up to the apple orchard to pick apples, which we would bring back down to the barn where we'd make fresh apple cider in the press. I'd explain how the composting toilets worked and how they were good for the environment. I would show them how cows were milked and then we'd feed the milk to the pigs. It was a really fun job.

And then there'd be days when there wasn't a group coming out. On those days I'd work with Tim, the hired hand. Some days we'd go out to the raspberry patch, and we'd pull suckers and make sure all the growing vines were trained inside the guide wires. Some days we'd go out and we'd mow. Some days we'd help John, the farm manager, with baling and stacking hay. By helping I mean John would drive the tractor and Tim and I would stack bales on the wagon and then into the loft in the barn. Well, the time came when we didn't have a group scheduled for a few days in a row. John decided that then was the time to clean out the stall that the cows used.

No exaggeration, the cow manure mixed with bedding hay was about 2 feet deep towards the back of the stall. It lessened to about a foot near the entrance. Let's just say that this job had not been tackled in quite a while. Tim and I quickly learned that the skid steer would not fit through the door into the stall, so our task was to scoop the mix of manure and urine and hay with pitch forks and then to load it into the bucket of the skid steer. Once that was full one of us would drive it over to a large pile that we were creating. On the one hand, we were smart enough to work our way into the stall, from front to the back. There was at least a little fresh air near the door. On the other hand, as we discovered on day three, it was deepest and smelliest towards the back. There was also less fresh air the deeper in – both literally and figuratively – that we went. And that, my friends, is the worst, grossest, most disgusting job that I have ever done. As we prepare to look at a similar job that Jesus undertook, as we gather and offer ourselves to be gathered up in Jesus by choosing to live by the call to love, let us pray...



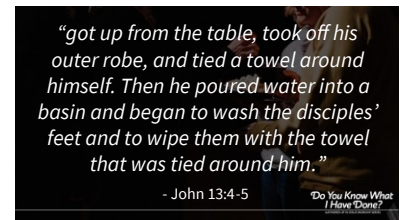
Please turn with me to John 13. John's gospel is the only gospel that never really discusses or even depicts the Last Supper. He alludes to it towards the end of chapter 6, but he does not include the traditional gathering in the upper room found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Overall, though, John has a completely different agenda than the other three gospels. So instead of focusing on or at least giving attention to the institution of communion, he spends time on this odd little event, on a neglect of hospitality, on a detail that was overlooked in the party planning. Jesus sets for the disciples and for us an example of how we are to live out our faith: he washes the disciples' feet.

In verses 4 and 5 we read about how Jesus *"got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself."*

*Then 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."*

I can't help but wonder what was going through Jesus' mind when he got up and grabbed the towel and the basin. Was it light-bulb moment where he thought, "Maybe if I show them what I mean, they'll finally get it?" Or was it yet another opportunity to be the words that he spoke? **Or**, or was it just a matter of course — he saw a need and got up to fill it, not thinking for a moment about how they would respond to such an act?



In the minds of the disciples, there was something demeaning about kneeling to serve in such a humbling way. That's probably why they all managed to overlook the opportunity. To each of the disciples, this was a demeaning task, a task far below them. But for Jesus it wasn't demeaning; it was an opportunity to serve.

Afterwards he asks, *“Do you know what I have done for you?”*

Nope, he could read it in their eyes. Blank stares and open mouths – that’s what Jesus saw as he asked this question.

In Luke’s gospel he follows the story of the upper room

gathering with a passage about how the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them. Even after this teaching by Jesus that we find in John 13, they were still looking for the best seats; they were still looking for their rewards in heaven, or on earth. They didn’t know what he had done, which means they didn’t know him. At all. We sometimes envy the disciples, because they got to spend time with him. This night, they didn’t get it. They didn’t have any advantage over us. But if we hear the story tonight and walk away appreciating what Jesus did, if we do not take his example to heart, then we are just like the disciples, not quite knowing Jesus.



As Jesus returns to the table, he explains how significant his actions are. He says, yes, you call me Lord and Teacher. That is well and good for that is who Jesus is. We all have titles too, don’t we? Pastor, father, husband – a few of mine. I could come to work tomorrow and see a mess left in the bathroom. I could tell Barb to go and clean that up. I could go home after church today and put my feet up, waiting for Kristin to pack my bag and load the car for our trip to see our son and daughter-in-law. I could demand that one of our other two children go and put gas in the car so we’re ready for our big trip. I could exercise authority and power over others. I could look at small tasks as below my position. Jesus could have too. He could have directed Nathaniel or Bartholomew to get a basin and to wash his and the other disciples’ feet. He sure could have. And they’d have walked on over to the basin and the towels just like Tim and I walked over to the stall in the barn.

But Jesus does not do any of that, he does not use his authority to command others to do this or that. Donning a servant's attitude, Jesus begins to wash the disciples' feet himself. And then, in verse 6, he gets around to Simon Peter. He struggles with one who is "above him" doing such a task for him. Jesus tells him, *"Unless I wash you, you have no share in me."* Continuing to demonstrate a lack of understanding, Peter then insists that Jesus not only wash his feet but wash his head and hands as well. If the washing of his feet connected him to Jesus, then why not go for more? Wash more of me Jesus, says Peter. I want more of you Jesus, Peter says. Jesus moves on, leaving Peter there at his place at the table. As he finishes, we pick up the story again, once more at verse 14.

Jesus instructs them, saying, *"So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

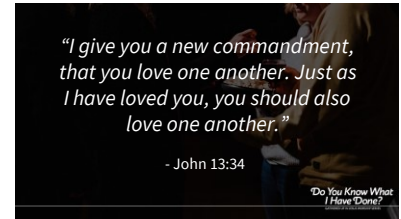
*"So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

- John 13:14-15

*"Do You Know What I Have Done?"*

Jesus is saying, if I can do this for you, then you can do it for one another. Continuing on, to further drive home his point, Jesus quotes a well-known proverb: *"Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master."* In the culture of the day, this proverb meant that the sacrifice modeled by the master should be seen in the life of the servant. The disciples would clearly hear Jesus' invitation to do as Jesus, the master, had done. He adds even more emphasis in verse 17, where he adds, *"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."* If you have seen my example and if you know the proverb – if you do these things, you'll be blessed.

Later on, in verse 34, Jesus says, *“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.”* Except the commandment wasn’t new, not really. It connects all the way back into the Old Testament. This principle, found in Leviticus 19:18, was deeply rooted in the Jewish faith. In the context of Leviticus 19 this principle was to counter the tendency to seek revenge or to hold a grudge. Neither was viewed by God as loving one’s neighbor. As I wrote in my blog this morning, Jesus chooses to apply this principle as a proactive statement rather than as a reactive statement. That is why he acted it out in front of them. That is why he chose to wash the disciples’ feet. By serving, by getting on his knees, by bending to a task that even fishermen thought was beneath them Jesus showed what *“just as I have loved you”* really means. “Love like I love,” says Jesus to his closest followers.



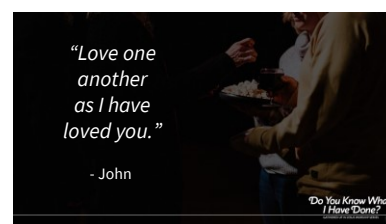
Now, for the disciples, this command wasn’t supposed to be a once-a-year command. It was never supposed to be just a ritual that they practiced sporadically. It was supposed to be a way of life. It is the willingness to serve that is the command. The *“maundy”* of Maundy Thursday literally means ‘command.’ Jesus commands the disciples to love one another like he loves them not just on one Thursday a year or every third Monday, but on any day and every day as opportunity presents itself. Jesus asked the disciples this question, but he also asks us: Do you know what I have done for you?



To get at the essence of that question, one must decide, what does it mean to love one another? There are many ways to answer this question. To me, it means that you are able to work for the good of the other, for the good of the one you're supposed to love. You are to hold the other in your heart and mind as you live and work. We are not to live and work just for our own good. We are to look for ways to serve one another. And sometimes we are to even seek to create opportunities to serve one another. Doing these things, I believe we are blessed.

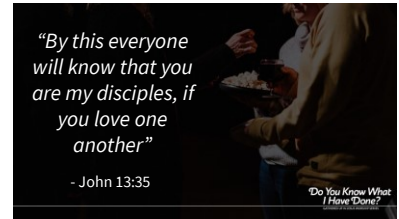
Now, choosing to be a humble servant, choosing to always love the other, well, it doesn't always feel like a blessing. This is part of the risk of service. Sometimes it doesn't turn out like you hoped; sometimes it isn't received as you intended. And our inclination is to stop rather than risk doing it wrong. In those instances, I invite you to trust God, to believe that good will come from your efforts at humble service. Often God has a way of working things out.

So, this command: *"Love one another as I have loved you."* It is not just a good idea, not just a clue to better living, not just a suggestion for health and happiness. No, Jesus made it a commandment: *"Love one another."* For those within the church, and especially for those outside of the church, it is the sign that we belong to Christ, that we are a part of the fellowship, that we are a part of the family. Belonging to Christ and to the community of faith not shown by how many Bible passages we read or by the acts of charity that we perform or by the hours of pew time that we log.





The sign is something else entirely: *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* It is not about what is inside of you, but what comes out. It is about what shows.



How do you show your love for one another? That's the question in front of us. It is not an easy one, to be sure. Loving takes time, takes sacrifice. It takes effort. Yet what he said was, *“Love as I have loved you.”* Here is where we come back to being gathered up in Jesus, the theme for this worship series. On our own, loving like he loved is beyond our abilities. But when we let that love work through us, it becomes possible, at least a small step at a time.

As we close, I invite you to consider what *“as I have loved you”* means. At the beginning I posed some questions. What was your greatest sin ever? Your worst failure of faith in your life? The most evil thing you've ever done? The cruelest words you've said to someone you love? Jesus' response to each of these also demonstrates how he loves. Jesus washes these away just as he washed the dirt and dust off the disciples' feet - with love, with compassion, with grace, with ease. What depth of love Jesus Christ has for you and for me! May we go and do as Jesus has done for us, loving well.