

Maundy Thursday

Year B, RCL

April 5, 2020

Gospel:

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

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. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 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." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

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? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. 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. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 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.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you

also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

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We call this day "Maundy Thursday". Maundy comes from the Latin word, *mandatum*. *Mandatum* is also the origin of the Spanish verb, *mandar*, to command. Jesus commands, mandates that we are to love, but not only love, but we are to love as Christ loved. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another". Jesus calls it a new commandment. And he says because we love one another, everyone will know that we are his disciples. It's our trademark, the way people recognize us as Christians.

If this were a normal Maundy Thursday, in a few moments we would wash one another's feet. Foot washing isn't considered one of the major sacraments, like baptism or the Eucharist, but it is sacramental nonetheless. If you've had a confirmation class, you know that a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." In this case, the outward and visible, the touching and cleansing of each other's feet, is a sign of Christ's love for us and of our love for one another. Foot washing is a physical representation of our desire to follow Jesus' commandment that we love one another as he loved us.

At this final supper with his disciples, Jesus wished to leave them with a powerful expression of his love for them. This was his leave taking - his farewell before he was arrested by the Romans, tried, crucified and taken into glory.

You may recall that a few weeks ago we read of the dramatic exit of the prophet Elijah, how with chariots of fire and a mighty whirlwind, Elijah was swept into heaven. But before Elijah's departure, his protégé Elisha boldly requested of Elijah, "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

Jesus' farewell to his disciples was far less spectacular. Instead of chariots and fire and whirling winds, we have Jesus kneeling before his disciples, demonstrating his love for them using water, towels, bowls, and their dirty feet.

Jesus' disciples may have been hoping, like Elisha, to inherit the authority, the glory of their Lord. Instead they received a towel. The towel that Jesus tied round his waist was emblematic of the servant's status that Jesus accepted for himself and expected of his disciples. Foot washing was the work of slaves, of servants, or perhaps of women. By removing his robe and taking up a towel Jesus chose to identify with the lowest of the low.

So how is it on this day 2000 years later, during the season of Corona, when we aren't able to wash one another's feet, when we must so distance ourselves from one another that we can't even shake hands – how might we continue to make this sacramental act a part of our lives? What outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace are we to adopt that would allow us to demonstrate to those around us, as Jesus did for his disciples, that we intend to follow Jesus' commandment that we love one another as he loved us.

Let me suggest to you that it is a sacramental act, an outward and visible sign that we love one another as Christ loved us when we practice social distancing. When instead of lovingly holding and washing one another's feet, we stand at least six feet apart. During this Holy Week instead of washing each other's feet, we demonstrate our love for those around us by washing our hands for 20 seconds. This is a Maundy Thursday in which we don't show our love by sharing communion with one another, but instead we avoid sharing germs by burying our coughs and sneezes beneath a raised arm. And instead of offering a loving smile during the passing of the peace, we show our love by hiding our smile behind a facial mask. And instead of gathering together on each day of Holy Week, during the season of Corona we demonstrate our love by staying home.

Jesus said to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." Two Thousand years later, it's an old commandment, but today we have a new way of putting it into practice.