

Our gospel passage today reflects ultimate love. It is what gives shape to future Christian worship and action, to our own worship: we worship with The Holy Eucharist and we behave as servants to the world.

Christ was the ultimate King. He could have installed himself on a splendid throne and lived forever. Instead, there is a great deal of pain involved. Jesus endures this, acting as a servant, out of pure love.

During Holy Week we glimpse an understanding of Christ's sacrifice. In moments of difficulty we can be reminded how to behave as Christians.

Remember where and when The Last supper occurs: This meal, brought in love, takes place before the Passover. It is the eve of the Day of Preparation. Jesus is preparing for the true Passover. He is doing so by demonstrating how to be a servant.¹

Tonight's Maundy Thursday service actually continues on Good Friday and ends on Easter Vigil. What I like about these three services, called in seminaries across the land, the triduum is that it reminds us of the continuity of Jesus' love for us: before, during, and after those difficult times, we can seek his presence.

In these three days we witness the love of Christ.

Demonstrated with foot washing. I have to admit, it is a bit of an uncomfortable act, especially as Episcopalians, we do not regularly incorporate it as part of our worship service. It is awkward. In Texas, we want to be at our best: including our toes. The first time Maundy Thursday came around, I went for a full mani-pedi in preparation for the day.

However, the foot washing is not about whether we go to Trellis in Houston or the local nail salon around the corner or nowhere. Maundy Thursday is about coming as we are to God's meal of love. It is about preparing our feet, the things that ground us, to walk with Christ along his journey. We are to lean into this awkwardness and overcome our discomfort as a community.² We take this basic body part and create a moment of tenderness, replicating what our Lord and Savior has done.³

It is important to note, the foot washing only takes place in John's gospel, there it is center stage. The meal is an aspect of our Maundy Thursday gospel story today. It is not the primary focus. Instead, John wants us to see ourselves as potential servants, helping followers wipe away the dirt of the world.

I think Jesus does this because he knows the disciples will draw back on that love he held for them. They will remember how he took away the accumulated mess on their feet, and in turn, they too will help others see Christ through the residue the world has left in their lives.

Many of these followers of Christ became martyrs.

Jesus is trying to help open our hearts while inviting us into his presence.

Imagine the strength and love that it took to give of oneself fully. To prepare by letting go of status and showing others with your actions that their place in society no longer matters.

That is what Jesus did and what the disciples would later come to do through their ministries.

We are to serve each other by taking away the muck of the world's judgment so that we can bask in the glory of Christ.

¹Lewis, K.M. (2014). *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary: John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

²Carpenter, L (2022). *The Gospel According to Improv: A Radical Way of Creative and Spontaneous Living*. New York: Church Publishing.

³Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. You see, as N.T. Wright notes, "Feet are very basic things: not pretty, not ugly, just basic."

What Jesus does is about love.⁴

Friends, we cannot truly walk in love and serve Christ without acknowledging something uncomfortable: there is evil in our midst. It tries to take us away from our role as servants. The gospel tells us this message.

The devil is ready to take over our hearts if we ignore Christ's love and directive. We can only experience the incarnational if we are open, giving. On the other hand, if we are like Judas, our hearts will be hard and unyielding.⁵

Therefore, our lives must be all about servitude

This is best done by putting others first with love in our hearts; as we just described.⁶ To understand the way to respond to Jesus' sacrifice, let us consider the actions of Jesus. He is kind, patient, and understanding. This is a savior wanting to relate to our very core, who we are as humans, us as people.⁷

There was once a priest, who served at Lord of the Streets as an intern, he described to me the moment he, literally, bent and cared for someone's feet. It was someone who had lived on the streets for years, and when the priest asked what the person needed, they asked him to clip his nails, which were long and yellow. So, with a tenderness that is embedded in this priest's personality, he went, and obtained some nail clippers, with care and time, he cut away the nails and with it, I think, some of the accumulation of the difficult life he lived. It did not solve problems, however, for a moment, that man felt some restoration to dignity.⁸

Let us remember that Jesus wanted us to do more than washing feet. He intended for us to be friends and to serve each other as equals. Whether we are housed or unhoused. Rich or poor. With doctorates or in preschool. In ministry, each of us has a place to serve and is equally loved by Christ.

We are to help each other wash away the dirt collected on our feet from travel because that would make us clean to enter the house and share a meal as friends. It can battle the evil in our lives. Jesus is the one eternal God.⁹ John's entire Gospel witnesses the fact that Jesus is and always will be forever. With his actions, Jesus is showing he is eternally our servant. And with that we are lovingly to put others first. Through this service we glimpse God.

Tonight, we will wash each other's feet. This is a tradition our Christian ancestors have taught us. This is a tradition we will pass down to our children. We will show them how to have

⁴ Though Peter is clueless as to how to respond to this, we do not have to be: respond in servitude.

⁵ Powery, E. (2022).

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/maundy-thursday/commentary-on-john-131-17-31b-35-13>

⁶ Serving is about sacrifice and love. The practice of footwashing led to the church following his instructions and washing each other's feet.

⁷ Lewis, K.M. (2014). *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary: John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

⁸ David Nelson Summer 2004.

⁹ Here in this time he is the one, true Lord that walks on earth. We know that as one God that makes him both before and with and after our time on earth. It is easy to misunderstand our actions when standing in front of greatness: We can move between extremes. Example of politics of parenting styles or running. Peters, in John's gospel, is the beloved disciple. Yet, we can take two stances, either Peter or Judas. We see over enthusiasm, something I can certainly relate. We do not understand the work of Satan, which literally means adversary. The minute that Judas, who was already betraying Jesus with his thievery, took the body and blood, his heart turned more against Jesus. This graceful action would not work on Judas because he was closed to Christ's message.

open hearts, resist evil, ready to receive Christ's love and in turn become servants.¹⁰ Just as Christ received us and trained us to love and see past social standing.

We need this training to prepare us for the world we live in - when someone presents a challenge to us, we have to ask ourselves: how can we stand with them in love?

We face real evil in the world as the disciples did, yet we have a choice. In that upper room, sitting beside Jesus, everyone had a choice. Including Judas. We see the hardening of his heart before our eyes. He closed his heart to love and servitude.

If we close our hearts to Christ, our ability to receive his life giving miracles is limited. From the very beginning, God has given us the free will to choose His path or the way of death.¹¹

Judas cannot respond to love, because he is more concerned with earthly matters: money and position. Instead, with a blocked heart, Judas puts the emphasis on being important.¹² We must accept what Christ gives us rather than wanting more prestige.

Therefore, respond in love at all times. We live in a world infested with sin. You see it on a daily basis: hate, war, exclusion, fighting, shaming of those who are unhoused. We must respond in love. We are called, during this agape meal, to be servants of Christ.

There are modern day ways to become foot washers. Alternatively, we can take part in local missions: volunteer to feed the unhoused at Hope Center or help in the mission by donating funds.

How can we understand Jesus' sacrifice? Christ is with us only a while longer. We look and lean towards love. We sit with the discomfort of the evening. Our Lord who reigns above us is also ready to serve us. Tonight we sit with Christ, our True King and leader. Through the foot washing and the commandment to love through service, we have our marching orders. May we open our hearts to this night and serve the Lord with gladness. Amen.

¹⁰ Powery, E. (2022).

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/maundy-thursday/commentary-on-john-131-17-31b-35-13>

¹¹ Powery, E. (2022).

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¹² Powery, E. (2022).

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