

Maundy Thursday, 2024

(John 13:1-17, 31b-35; Ex 12:1-4; I Cor 11:23-26; Ps 116:1-2, 12-19)

What marvelous gifts we receive from Jesus in today's gospel! He bestows three treasures for our faith and life: the gift of footwashing; the gift of holy communion; and a new commandment: **Love one another as I have loved you.** Even as he was journeying toward his own death, Jesus was providing for the salvation of our souls.

The first gift is true servant love, demonstrated in washing the disciples' feet. I want to share with you the wonderful perspective on this from beloved Christian author Max Lucado. (Quotes are taken from *Just Like Jesus, Gentle Thunder, Grace.*)

In Jesus' day, writes Lucado, the washing of feet was a task reserved not just for servants, but for the lowest of servants. . . . The servant at the bottom of the totem pole was expected to be the one on his knees with the towel and the basin. . . .

In this case the one with the towel and basin is the king of the universe. Hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before his disciples. . . .

You can be sure Jesus knows the future of these feet he is washing. These twenty-four feet will not spend the next day following their master, defending his cause. These feet will dash for cover at the flash of a Roman sword. Only one pair of feet won't abandon him in the garden. One disciple won't desert him at Gethsemane—Judas won't even make it that far!

Jesus knows what these men are about to do. . . . And he wants them to remember how his knees knelt before them and he washed their feet. . . . He forgave their sin before they even committed it. He offered mercy before they even sought it. End quote.

In showing his disciples what true servanthood meant, Jesus really upset Peter: Peter the outspoken, Peter the impulsive, Peter of the good intentions. When Jesus reached him, Peter cried out aghast, **Lord, are you going to wash my feet?**

We easily forget just how much of our lives—thoughts, words, and deeds, things done and left undone—how much needs to be cleansed of guilt, washed free of sin. We get stuck in our own ways, which so often are not God’s ways. We get bogged down in the busy-ness of life, the values that surround us, our own comforts and pleasures and desires. How often we serve our own sinful selves instead of the God who died for us.

It's good, and *healing*, to remember that every sin of which we repent is forgiven by Jesus. It can be even more powerful to picture Jesus kneeling at your feet, *washing* your feet, as a tangible reminder that he loves through serving.

More words from Max Lucado: *To place our feet in the basin of Jesus is to place the filthiest parts of our lives into his hands. In the ancient East, people’s feet were caked with mud and dirt. The servant of the feast saw to it that the feet were cleaned. Jesus is assuming the role of the servant. He will wash the grimeiest part of your life—if you let him!*

The water of the Servant comes only when we confess that we are dirty. Only when we confess that we are caked with filth, that we have walked forbidden trail and followed the wrong paths.

We will never be cleansed until we confess we are dirty. We will never be pure until we admit we are filthy. And we will never be able to wash the feet of those we have hurt us until we allow Jesus, the one we have hurt, to wash ours.

Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, he reaches out in kindness and says, I can clean that if you want. And from the basin of his grace he scoops a palm full of mercy and washes away our sin. End quote.

The basin of water Jesus used to wash his disciples' feet reminds us of the basin of water used for the sacrament of baptism. Footwashing is a dramatic reminder of that sacrament by which we first became children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus himself, baptized into his death so we can live a new life.

But footwashing is only part of the heritage we celebrate today as Christians. In baptism we were sealed by the Holy Spirit and *marked with the cross of Christ forever*. But Christ gives us also a *second* sacrament, holy communion, the Lord's Supper. So when we sin—as we do in thought, word, and deed, in the secret depths of our desires and annoyances and prejudices—when we sin, Jesus gives us his own body and blood to wash away the shame and guilt.

Why does he do it? Why does Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, go to such trouble to free us from our sin and guilt and shame?

One reason is so that you, too, can give to others what he's first given to you: Servant love. Forgiveness. By our baptism into his death, he lives in us so we can do as he did. By the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

That's why he gave us the new commandment, **to love one another as he has loved us.**

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Another reason is that he loves you. He loves you more deeply and truly than you've ever loved anyone in your life. He loves you so much he'd do anything for you—even die for you.

So come to the Supper! Jesus gives himself to you here and now, for *this* life, not only for the life to come. Come and celebrate the gracious gifts of Love itself, given and shed for you *and for all people* for the forgiveness of sins, the salvation of your souls, and life everlasting!

Thanks be to God!