

“It Begins With Receiving”  
John 13:1-15  
Rev. Liz Kearny  
Longview Presbyterian Church  
Maundy Thursday  
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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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” It's easy to hear this line and immediately start making plans to selflessly serve others. You think, “What can I give? How can I serve? Whose feet am I called to wash?” I know this is the heartbeat of our church family. I've never been in a community of faith that has so consistently and faithfully found ways to give of themselves to serve others, to kneel to the floor to wash the feet of those we are called to love sacrificially. And I find this spirit in us is especially alive and well now, even as it is mixed with frustration and longing, as so many of us are asking, “How am I supposed to help others, to love sacrificially, to serve lavishly when I am called to stay home?”

But let's slow down a moment together. Because I believe the example Jesus was setting for us on this night actually began a chapter earlier in John's gospel, when Jesus' *own* feet were anointed, washed by Mary. In John 12:3, John tells us that “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.” When Judas caused a fuss, telling Jesus that this was a waste because the money for the perfume could have been used to care for the poor, we can almost hear how deeply moved Jesus is by Mary's lavish love for him: “Leave her alone,” Jesus says. “She bought it so that she

might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” (John 12:7) It seems that this night of foot-washing did not begin with Jesus giving love. It began a chapter earlier with Jesus *receiving* love as Mary knelt down to wash her Savior’s feet.

I don’t know how you do with receiving love, but I do about as well as Peter does most of the time. “You will never wash my feet,” says Peter to Jesus, and me to God and others because I would like it to be known that I am competent and capable of earning my own way, thank you very much. Staying in constant giving mode has the benefit of not only being totally socially acceptable as a Christian, but it also allows me to continue lying to myself about having total control over my life and my relationships.

But the love of God has never been about control. And perhaps that is the thing Jesus most wants to show his disciples on this last night they are spending together. The kind of love that Jesus lavishes on the disciples in radical hospitality as he washes their feet is the love he has continually received from his Father, where Jesus came from and where he knew he was going. And more specifically, Jesus had received the lavish love of Mary as she washed his feet with perfume and dried them with her own hair, an act of devotion that seems to have left a mark on Jesus. Perhaps it was the mark left by Mary’s reckless love for him that propelled Jesus to enter headlong into this night, washing the feet not only of his closest friends and disciples, but also Judas, the one who Jesus knew had plans to betray him for some silver, and also Peter, who Jesus knew would deny even knowing him 3 times in the next 24 hours. Perhaps Jesus, God with flesh on,

wants us to know that the only way to follow him in selfless love to the cross is to first receive love. Like love of God is less straight line coming from one solitary point, and more a continual circle, giving in generous mutuality, flowing and overflowing from God into us onto others and all the way around again. Jesus doesn't want us to become a wellspring of life on our own. He wants us to join this ever-flowing circle of Trinitarian love. Much to mine and Peter's dismay, it is in first receiving love that radical hospitality is born. Perhaps this is why Jesus responds to Peter's grand protest by saying, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Unless you receive love from me, Beloved, you will never be able to give love in my name.

This night holds an invitation for us in this strange season. Even as so many of us feel turmoil in our gut as we try to figure out how to give sacrificially during this time of staying in our homes, perhaps Jesus, in this last night with us before his death, wants to invite us to slow down and let him wash us in love. To unclench our hands from our perceived control and open them wide for what God wants to *give us* in this season. To become aware of the ways we, like Peter, are resistant to God's lavish, wasteful love for us. To move from our state of constant doing to practice simply being. To admit to those we love that we are tired and weary and allow them to shoulder the burden we have been bearing alone. Friends, let us press pause on our urge to fix the world tonight and let us instead weep with gratitude. For tonight our Savior has knelt at our feet to tenderly wash us with the waters of grace. Amen.