Maundy Thursday Sermon

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

*Jesus intimately loves us and empowers us to intimately love one another.*

A few years ago, my boyfriend, and now husband, James took me on a date to Washington DC. I was very excited as we planned a nice lunch and even a trip to the Zoo which I had never seen before. We also planned to stop and visit one of our friends who was serving a Lutheran Congregation on his internship.

Since it was a date and I wanted to impress James I took extra time to pick my outfit and accessories. I did however make one classic mistake. I wore a new pair of shoes. That day we walked all over the city. By the time we finished our trip to the zoo and were going to head to the church my feet were swollen, red, and not looking their best.

All I wanted when we arrived at the church was to sit and relax my feet. It was then that our friend came over and greeted us. He then mentioned that as it was Maundy Thursday, we would be having the footwashing during worship, and he asked if we would go first so that it would help the more nervous parishioners to feel comfortable.

Again, my feet were not in their finest shape but how could I say no to our friend? So, as the service progressed, I got more and more anxious. I remember taking my shoes and socks off in advance so I would be ready. When the time came, I awkwardly went down the aisle and sat in the chair. It was there that I experienced one of the most intimate and deeply moving discipleship experiences I have ever had.

Our friend could clearly see my feet were not in the best shape. Yet he looked at me and gave me a kind smile before he gently took my feet and placed them in the warm water. He then carefully took them out, poured warm water over them, and then tenderly used a soft towel to dry them.

I remember I began to gently cry because here my friend was seeing my feet at their worst and yet he did not care. He simply wanted to show his love to me, and his commitment to discipleship. In his intimate and humble action of washing my feet I experienced the risen Christ. When my feet were completely dry he then handed me the towel and I knew it was my turn to wash someone else’s feet.

I don’t remember the person whose feet I washed. She was a stranger and yet in that moment we were not strangers but disciples of Jesus who were demonstrating our commitment to the calling of Jesus for his disciples to love and humbly serve one another.

Jesus knows that Judas has gone to betray him, and that soon he will be arrested, abandoned by his disciples, and given a corrupted trial where he will be sentenced to die on the cross. Yet in his last few hours with his disciples he chooses not to berate them, not to complain about them, but one last time to show them intimate and humble loving service by washing their feet.

In Jesus day many people walked wearing sandals. On the dusty and dirty roads your feet would not look the best after traveling. It was customary for the host of a dinner or gathering to have a slave or the lowest ranking member of the household wash the feet of guests. This provided comfort for the guests, showed hospitality, and probably made sure the host’s house was kept clean.

Yet Jesus does not delegate this role to a slave, nor does he shame any of the disciples by calling them out as the lowest ranking member. Instead Jesus himself, God made flesh, the creator of the universe chooses to wash the feet of the disciples.

Let’s face it washing feet is strange, and perhaps it makes us a little uncomfortable. If you feel this way about it then you are in good company. Just look at how St. Peter reacted at first to Jesus washing his feet.

Peter protests by saying, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet” and “You will never wash my feet." Peter is I think trying to help Jesus save face. Peter is trying to defend Jesus honor. What does Jesus say in response? "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Jesus tells his disciples that engaging in humble, intimate, and even humiliating acts of loving service is part of being his disciple. Jesus also explains to the disciples that a leader is not above others. Instead all disciples of Jesus are equal.

Intimate and humble love. This is the kind of love that Jesus says marks his disciples. Intimate humble love is something so foreign to our society that it is no wonder it might sound strange. To intimately love someone means to let them know you at your best and worst.

To let them see you as you truly are and not to pretend to be someone else. To intimately love someone is the ultimate gesture of trust and it frightens us because there is risk involved. What if the person turns us away when we are at our worst? What if the person does not like the me as I really am?

To humbly and intimately love someone has risk involved and that scares us. Yet no matter what there is someone who intimately loves you just as you are whether you are at your best or worst. That person is Jesus. Jesus intimately loved his disciples even knowing they would abandon and deny him. Jesus demonstrated this by humbly and lovingly washing their feet just before he would give the ultimate proof of his intimate love for them by dying on a cross.

After giving a demonstration of what intimate loving service looks like, Jesus then called his disciples to practice the same intimate humble love with each other so that they would grow in their faith, and so that the love practiced among themselves would spill out into the community and Jesus would be glorified.

Jesus intimately loves you. Jesus knows you just as you are. The real you. Jesus knows you at your best and worst, and you know what he intimately loves the real you. Jesus does not forsake or turn you away. Jesus loves you so intimately that he was born into the world for you so that he could go to the cross for you.

Tonight, we gather to practice this kind of humble intimate love with one another in the washing of feet. We practice this kind of love with one another in a safe space with people who love us. We practice this love which our Lord Jesus Christ so willing demonstrated to the disciples long ago, and that Jesus still deeply feels for us. Amen.