



MAUNDY THURSDAY
APRIL 9, 2020
PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE

Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. AMEN

This evening we have the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples in the Gospel of John. Since none of the Synoptic Gospels include this foot-washing story, why did John find it important enough to include in his writings? To me it is an essential story not only in that it shows us what humble service looks like, but it also tells us to whom that humble service is to be showered on.

How many times have we heard or maybe said that the disciples didn't get it. They were a rag tag bunch of ordinary, or maybe less than ordinary men who were called by Jesus to follow him and to carry on in His footsteps. They even on occasion asked Jesus what a teaching or a parable, as we call them today, meant. They were not afraid to let Jesus know that they did not understand. And we get that from reading Scripture. The disciples did not understand many things and even though we now have the whole story, neither do we.

Tonight I want to look at this experience of foot-washing a bit more closely for just a few minutes. John tells us that the meal had already started. So it was an unusual time for foot washing to start. Normally

it would be done as guests arrived at a home. Jesus, however, chooses a different time; possibly to highlight the act he was about to perform.

Imagine with me, the disciples as they watched Jesus stand up, remove his robe, most likely clothed only in a loincloth, tie a towel around himself and kneel down to wash their feet. This was a menial task usually done by a slave or a woman. It would be only seldom that a rabbi would have his feet washed by the likes of the disciples. For these disciples, Jesus' service was a gracious act of hospitality, not done by the usual servant, but by their Lord.

So it would be usual for Peter to pipe up as the spokesman for the group and ask if Jesus is going to wash their feet. It was a question that had a powerful statement in it. Most likely he meant to say, you are not going to wash my feet, you are the Messiah, the chosen one.

Implying that Peter and the disciples are not worthy to have Jesus wash their feet, this statement also conveys the idea that Jesus is doing something bad, something wrong. Remember another time when Peter rebuked Jesus? It was when Jesus was explaining to the disciples what was going to happen to Him, that he would be mistreated and put to death. And so just as Peter did not want death to come to Jesus, so too he did not want to let Jesus wash his feet. So Jesus makes the next move and tells him that Peter must let him wash his feet, or he will not have his inheritance in God's kingdom.

Something more is going on here other than simple foot washing. Yes, Jesus is giving them a personal up-close example of humble service. It is for them to see how Jesus wants them to treat one another. But still more is going on here. Jesus is preparing the disciples for His cross. This foot washing is a foretaste of the larger act of humble service that Jesus will render on the cross. This whole foot washing

scene was a parable in action, and one that would come true by the end of the week, as Jesus drew closer to death on the cross.

Once Jesus got his idea across to Peter, Peter in his usual over exuberance, asks Jesus to wash also his hands and head. Peter wants to make sure he is ultra clean from head to toe and everything in-between. So again we see that Peter and the disciples still do not understand, don't grasp where Jesus is headed and what is about to happen, and what this foot washing is all about.

So Jesus goes on to try to explain to the disciples. And Jesus now alludes to Judas that not all of them are clean. Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him. Yet he does not call him out, just yet. And this to me is the importance of the story. At least what really resonates with me.

Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him and soon. Yet he still washed his feet. He does not bypass serving Judas even though he well knew what was in Judas's heart. For me that is, in itself, a great sign of what a gracious God we have. He served the least, the lost and the lowly and also now the traitor, actually the one who would give him up to be crucified.

The act of foot washing, of humble service was for cleansing. Cleaning the dusty road dirt off their feet, yes, but also the cleaning of their souls, an act of salvation. And it was open to all the disciples, not just 11 but 12, even the one who would betray Him. What a gracious God we have.

This story gives me hope; hope that I do not need to be perfect, or better or even always trying to do my best. Through Jesus, the love of God is for all people. The promise of forgiveness and grace is all

wrapped into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our assurance of life abundant and life eternal is secured through Jesus, our Savior.

And how do we look at Judas? What do we do with him? Is there really a place in heaven, in the Kingdom of God for a traitor, a thief, and a sinner? We can look at Judas in many different ways:

- Judas was a Zealot and was trying to force Jesus hand to get him to unleash his power and overthrow the Roman Empire.
- Judas was a Judean and probably a malcontent with a wrong attitude about Jesus.
- Judas was the treasurer and would have had a powerful obsession with money.
- Judas could have simply been overcome by the power of Satan due to his personal weakness.

No matter what you think. Judas has a role to play in the drama of salvation. So do we condemn him or give him applause?

Well, I think that society would probably not give him the key to the city. One thing I thought about this week was how many children I know that were named Judas. None! Just like Thomas became the doubter, Judas was the traitor. But before we figure out what to do with Judas, we should remember that there is a little Judas in us all. No one is perfect, except our Lord Jesus. None of us deserved to have Jesus wash our feet. None of us have earned the right to claim the gracious gifts of God.

Well, I am not going to dwell on Judas. But rather I am going to try to follow Jesus' example. I am not necessarily going to wash your feet even next Maundy Thursday, and RB you are off the hook too! But I am going to try to do as Jesus commands in the second half of our Gospel lesson today; to love one another.

“Just as I have loved you”, Jesus says. We are to love one another just like Jesus loved Peter, James, John, Judas and the others. Jesus went

to the cross for all his disciples; for you, for me, for Peter, James, John and even Judas.

We have an awesome God, who through Jesus' humble service, from foot washing to dying on the cross, has shown us mighty love. We would do well to continue to try to illustrate that love to others. And remember that does not mean that we need to be in love with everyone we meet. That would be unrealistic, yet we can help everyone. Action-love is what we are called to. It is a gift of Christ, who loved us, showed us how love behaves and makes of us a new people born again in his image and capable of loving with His love. As Galatians 2:20 says, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

God's love does have the last word. It is a word of forgiveness and grace. And as His disciples, we are given this new commandment to go and love one another. So go, serve and show love for your neighbor. AMEN