

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Maundy Thursday, April 14, 2022

Exodus 12: 1-4, (5-10),11-14; Psalm 116:1,10-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13: 1-17,31b-35

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

Tonight's liturgy holds before us a choice like no other liturgy in the church year. That choice is about vulnerability, intimacy, and love. It is, in some ways, more challenging, more real, more bodily, than many of us are comfortable with. Most days it is pretty easy to come to church. We sing, we pray, we receive communion, then we go to lunch with family and friends. We can too easily forget the challenge, the risk, the vulnerability, and the intimacy of eating the body and blood of another person, Jesus Christ

One by one, Jesus kneels on the floor in front of each disciple. One by one, the water of his love washes over the feet of each disciple. No one is left out. Judas. Peter. The ones who say nothing. All are washed. All are loved. Tonight, is different. There will be body and blood but there will also be feet. Maybe tonight, however, is not as different as we think. The risk, vulnerability, and intimacy of eating his body and blood are the same risk, vulnerability, and intimacy of washing feet: humble, self-giving love. Tonight, Jesus offers his life in bread, wine, and washing. By his example and command, we are to remove the shoes and socks of another, receive their feet, their life, into our hands, and wash. We are to remove our shoes and socks, place our feet, our life, into the hands of another, and be washed. This is the way of Christ, the way of love. It is a choice not just for tonight but every day and every night, not just in the liturgy but in the world.

Deep intimate love is, I believe, what attracts and draws some to this liturgy. I wonder, though, if it is also what keeps many others away. It is why some will wash and be washed, and many will not. Tonight, however, is not simply a choice of whether to wash feet, but a choice to love or not love. Jesus chose to love. Not some, but all. That is the choice before us. We cannot choose to love only those whom we like, whom we deem deserving, for whom we have good feelings, those who look, think, or act like us. It is all or nothing. If we do not love all, we love none. Love, for Jesus, is not about feelings and emotions but about a choice. In Jesus' teaching if you have feet, you get washed, regardless of where those feet have been or where they are going. That is the example and commandment he sets before his disciples and us. The first person the disciples will have to choose to love or not love is Judas, the one who turns away, the one who walks in the night, the one who betrays. That, also, is our first choice. Every one of us has at least one Judas in our life. Every one of us has been Judas to someone else. Sometimes we have been Judas to ourselves.

Are you ready to take this relationship to the next level? That is always Jesus' question to us. It is answered by our relationships with one another. If Jesus, our Lord and Teacher, has washed our feet, we also ought to wash one another's feet. Feet and water are just the outward signs. The inner reality, the purpose, and goal is love. Love and only love is to determine and define our relationships with each other. This is more than polite behavior, kind acts, and nice words. The love Jesus commands goes beyond positive feelings, attraction, or attachment to another. It is an orientation and disposition of openness, receptivity, and self-giving towards another. It is choosing to receive into our hands the feet of another regardless of who's they are or where they have been. It is the willingness to hold and care for those feet regardless of what they look like or what they have done. It is forgiving those feet that

have kicked us and asking forgiveness of those we have stepped on. It is remembering that the feet we hold were created and are loved by the same God who created and loves our feet. It is recognizing how much those feet look like our own feet.

Now that sounds really nice, but you know as well as it is easier said than done. "You will never wash my feet," Peter says to Jesus. For Peter position and roles order relationships. They determine what is shared and how it is shared. Peter is a disciple and Jesus is his Lord and Teacher. We are not so different. We probably understand Peter's protest. More often than not how we treat each other and the way we define our relationships are determined according to position and role, who has and who is: who has status, power, control, and wealth, who is important, useful, or deserving. These are the criterion by which most of the world lives. They are also the criterion by which most of the world suffers. All that gets washed away tonight.

We all have different positions and roles: parent-child, priest-parishioner, husband-wife, employer-employee, teacher-student, ruler-ruled. That's not the issue. Jesus acknowledges his own position and role in the life of the disciples. "You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am." Jesus is not eliminating positions and roles. Instead, he is changing their contents and creating them anew. They are not to be filled with domination and hierarchy but with love and communion. So, no matter what position we occupy or what role we fill it is to be the place in and through which we become lovers of one another. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. Who is your Judas? Name him or her and then choose. Choose to wash and love as Jesus has washed and loved you. **Amen.**