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Maundy Thursday
21 April 2011
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

He's heavenly, eternal, and from the beginning with His Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ is both Lord and God—

He always was and is and is to come.

It's this heavenly Son of God that the disciples came to know as their Lord and Master.

They knew He was great.

He wasn't like any other Rabbi—

He was brilliant and performed the miraculous;

but He was also compassionate, and more merciful than anyone they'd met before!

And now, on a particular Thursday evening some 1,981 years ago today,

Jesus called His 12 disciples to share one last meal—a Passover meal.

If you want to know what happened during this feast and the Sacramental meal that followed, then go read St. Matthew's Gospel, or Mark's, or Luke's—

St. John assumes you know them—

and you do!

You know that,

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said:

‘Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.’

And in the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying:

‘Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”

You know about the Lord's Supper,

about His giving His own body and blood for your forgiveness and life.

But St. John wants you to know how that Holy Meal fits within the rest of the story—

how that very meal is a summary of all our Lord's work for you.

And to do that, he tells us about our Lord washing His disciples feet.

Now the very first thing to note, is that Jesus is the Lord or Master at this meal.

It's a bit obvious, I know—

but when it's clear that Jesus is the master, the Host,
 it ought to be even stranger that He gets up from the meal, *lays down* His
 garment, His outer robe,
 and starts filling a bucket with water to wash His disciples feet.

To wash feet isn't so strange,
 especially in a culture where sandals are worn year-round
 and walking is your transportation.

But normally, feet are washed *before* the meal—
 before the guest comes in and gets comfortable, his feet are washed.

What's also strange, is that the Host *never* washes feet—
 the servants take care of that.

And so it is that Jesus, the Lord and Master and Host of the party,
 gets up from the table, lays down His outer garment, and starts washing feet.

Jesus is the servant.
 He's the humble servant who lays down everything that's properly His—
 Glory, Might, Honor, Wealth, Power, and even His outer garment—
 and takes up the rags and duties of a servant—
 humility, servitude, shame, and washing of feet.

Now, Peter is the voice of the Apostles.
 He's their leader—for good or ill.
 And he's spontaneous—
 he doesn't always think things all the way through.

He's a lot like you and me.
 He speaks before he thinks;
 he goes with his gut,
 and so he rejects this foot-washing Jesus:
“You shall never in eternity wash my feet—” (Jn 13:8).

With these words Peter becomes the father of Pietism,
 thinking Jesus too holy to serve *him*—
 if anything, it ought to be Peter washing Jesus' feet.

To this false sense of holiness, Jesus responds,
“If I don't wash you, then you have no share with me” (13:8).

And now another gut reaction, another spontaneous outburst of false humility,
“Lord, then not only my feet but also my hands and my head as well!” (13:9).

Now Peter tries to go above and beyond the Lord's word—

the way the Lord has given and chosen to serve isn't good enough, he needs more!

We're not too different from Peter.

We're either too humble to let the Lord do the serving—

“Oh no, I'll take care of that, you just sit there and get praised by *me*.”

Or we're too sinful to simply be cleaned by the means the Lord has given—

“Baptism is too simple, the Lord's Supper is too mundane, and who can believe that the Pastor's words aren't his, but the Lord's?”

This all happens when our Lord *laid down* His outer garment.

Those words, “*laid down*” are much richer than we might think.

They describe the Lord setting down His outer robe—

but more than that, they speak of our Lord laying down His greatness.

Jesus is the Son of God, remember—

coeternal with Father and Spirit,

and yet He set all of His glory and wealth and majesty and power aside—

taking up the form of a servant, of humanity, for you.

Washing His disciples feet is the sign of His laying everything down for you,
even His life.

And it's *this* that He calls, “love.”

The whole foot-washing scene begins with St. John telling us that

“He loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them *to the end*” (13:1).

That means all the way, no partial love, no bits of love, no half-hearted love here—
but the whole lot of it.

All the love the God has is now given to His disciples.

And you know this because He loved them *to the end*—

that is, to the fulfillment, to the completion, *to the cross*.

John has elsewhere said:

“Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friend” (Jn 15:13); and,

“For God *loved* the world in this way, that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16).

So we rightly ask,

“What makes washing feet an act of love?”

“Why does John focus on *this*, and not the institution of the Lord's Supper?”

It all starts to make sense when we see that “love” for John is not an emotion or a feeling—
it's a self-sacrificial action by God.

Love is laying down everything you have for the other.

It's setting aside your honor and dignity and glory and strength, for the sake of the weak.

Love is servanthood—

it's washing the feet of those who least deserve it.

This is the new commandment—

“That you love one another:

just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (Jn 13:34).

Loving each other is nothing new,

but loving *to the end*,

loving to fulfillment, completion, and to the cross—

well that's a love that's never been seen before!

No one had ever died for the sins of the ungodly until this Jesus.

And the sign of this love is seen in His washing the disciples feet.

We should note that this love takes place when Jesus **“rose from the supper”** (13:4).

So also, the commandment of love is for you who *rise from the supper*.

You, who have now received this self-sacrificial love into your very mouths,

are to go and offer yourselves in love.

You are to die for your neighbor, your family, your co-workers, and your classmates.

“By this all people will know that you are My disciples,

if you have *love* [self-sacrificial love] for one another” (13:35).

And how can you have *that* sort of love,

unless you first receive it from the Lord?

So come to the feast.

Come to the Supper where the Lord delivers to you *His* self-sacrificial love.

Come, take, and eat; take, and drink.

Jesus loves you,

and so He gives Himself up to death for you,

and from the cross, forgives you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit