

Maundy Thursday
2024
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life.

Amen.

It seems nearly impossible to find humility in our world today.

I wonder if some of our young people even know what humility is.

Do they have someone they can look to
whose life stands in opposition to
the it's all about me behavior that is so pervasive.

Humility is hard – no doubt.

It's hard not to follow our societal norms
of making sure we get what we're due,
to publicly assert our self confidence to the nth degree,
and to put our needs before others.

Maundy Thursday is about turning the table upside down
and turning the world right side up.

That is why we gather tonight.

To re-orient ourselves to what we,
as followers of Christ, are called to.

On the face of it, it seems shocking and beyond our reach.

But Jesus and the disciples show us that is not the case.

“Unless I wash you, you have no share with me”

I suspect we can relate to Peter’s response:

“You will never wash my feet”

And yet, that is exactly what Jesus is asking us to do.

To take off our shoes and let Him wash our feet.

Tonight’s Gospel begins this story
by inviting the reader to stand with Jesus
during the most consequential period in his life and ministry.

Everything is changing.

Jesus has entered Jerusalem to cheers.

For the authorities, this isn’t supposed to happen.

Jesus is aware of the gravity of the moment
and its implications for his life
and for his disciples’ future.

He is aware that his hour has come
and that his ministerial journey
in “this world” has come to an end.

And he is confident that
his relationship with God is secure
and that he has loved “his own”
without restraint and “to the end.”

Tonight's Gospel confirms that
Jesus' love is sustainable, without limit or doubt.

The Gospel's second emphasis is on love.

The author of the Gospel chose the Greek verb agapao. (a ga pow o)

Agapao means to prove or exhibit love through action.

We see throughout scripture
that Jesus proved his love for his own
by engaging in concrete practices
that transformed their lives and
preserved their spiritual, physical, psychic, and material well-being.

We have a myriad of examples in scripture
of Jesus' acts of healing, proclaiming, teaching,
delivering, saving, welcoming, feeding,
interceding, intervening, and advocating.

We see in all of these acts
that Jesus manifested his love to the end.

Regardless of each person's station in society.

As the guests are eating,
Jesus leaves the table,
removes his outer robe,
ties a towel around his waist,
pours water into a basin,
kneels and begins to wash his disciples' feet
and dry them with the towel.

As Jesus approaches Peter,
Peter is not having any of this and exclaims:

“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?
... you will **never** wash my feet”

Foot washing was an accepted
and expected act of hospitality
toward guests whose feet were soiled
from traveling the dusty roads of the villages
and towns throughout ancient Palestine.

The task was typically performed
by servants in wealthier homes
or by guests themselves in more meager homes.

It was also common practice
for servants to wash their masters' feet
or for students to wash their teachers' feet.

But what Jesus was doing, was not okay.

It was unprecedented.
A master did not wash his disciples' feet.

Peter clearly views Jesus' actions as a violation of protocol.

He also views himself, and likely the others,
as unworthy of such a great outpouring of love
from the one they regard as Lord.

And Peter was right: Jesus' actions were improper.

But Peter has failed to understand the significance of the ritual.

Jesus said: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

As he begins to understand,
Peter submits to Jesus' ministrations.

Jesus also invites us to understand.

"Do you know what I have done to you?"

Jesus does not wash his disciples' feet
for the sake of instituting a new ritual.

He is reminding us also
that a share with him includes following his example
of sustained love for one another
and for all others we encounter.

Jesus invites us,
just as he did the disciples,
to live as an expression of his presence on the earth.

To exemplify love for one another,
so that "everyone will know" we are his disciples.

To embody his ministerial vision as our own
and do the work necessary to bring that vision to fruition.

On Maundy Thursday, we receive Jesus' commandment anew:

"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

And now, let us humbly and lovingly wash each other's feet.

Then let us leave here tonight
ever more convicted in our share with Jesus
including following his example
of sustained love for one another
and for all others we encounter.

And in so doing,
let us turn the table upside down
and begin the hard work of turning the world right side up
by loving one another to the end.