

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Maundy Thursday - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

I Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

03/29/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him,

“One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

^{31b}“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Mutual Love

Good evening! What does it mean for Christians to love one another? We hear in the Gospel Jesus say: ³⁴*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* ³⁵*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” But love is a fickle thing to describe. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines love as *“A strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personalities. Maternal love for a child. Or attraction based on sexual desire: affection and tenderness felt by lovers.”* And they also say it’s *“Warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion.”*¹

Is that it? It seems like love is so much more complex than just “warm attachment.” It seems like the type of love that Christ is calling us to is something that transcends simply having “a strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personalities.” So, as I read this text I can’t help but believe that the goal for a preacher on Maundy Thursday is to help the community understand what love looks like.

Strangely, it begins with some dirty feet. Dr. O’Day writes that *“Foot washing was practiced in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts in the ancient Mediterranean world. It had three main functions: (1) personal hygiene; (2) an act of hospitality; or (3) a cultic act. Since the foot washing in John 13 occurs in the context of a meal, the practice of foot washing as hospitality provides the most helpful analogue in interpreting the Johannine text. Foot washing was a way of welcoming one’s guests; a person’s feet would become dusty during the journey,*

¹<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>

and the host offered water so that guests could wash their feet... The foot washing was normally performed by the guests themselves, or by servants at the behest of the host... ”²

I don't really enjoy washing feet, but something about the Maundy Service makes it my second favorite service in the church year. The Gospel of John does things differently. Where the other three gospels, called the synoptics, have Jesus' ministry lasting one year, John has that ministry lasting three. Where the synoptics have the cleansing of the temple at the end of the story, becoming a reason for Jesus' crucifixion, the Gospel of John has Jesus cleansing the temple at the BEGINNING of his ministry. We get no birth narrative, instead a beautiful poem about the Word become flesh that harkens back to the creation story in Genesis. And one of the more significant differences is that day on which Jesus dies. In the synoptic Gospels Jesus celebrates the passover in the upper room with the disciples, instituting the Sacrament of Holy Communion. But in the Gospel of John we get no institution of the Lord's Supper; Jesus doesn't even make it to the Passover meal. John wants to drive home the idea that Jesus IS the sacrificial lamb that was killed on Passover, and so he dies on the same day. At the same time the temple would be sacrificing to God, Jesus dies for us on the cross.

So we get this strange meal where Jesus delivers his final lesson, a lesson that begins with washing feet. It's a lesson in service, something we Christians seem to always need. And behind this lesson on service sits the larger lesson of what real love looks like. In fact, you might say that true love, for all my exposition on its complexity, could be summarized as this: Love is a decision.

²The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Volume IX. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994. pp. 615

Think about it. We've all seen the cheesy romance movies where the characters fall deeply and madly in love in 90 minutes. And while we can enjoy those movies, we all at some point in our lives realized that it just isn't real, if we keep waiting for that "special moment" we'll be waiting forever. Likewise, we think of love as sacrifice, stories of friends or families giving up their lives with the hope that someone else will have the chance for something better. But it all boils down to that specific moment when the person DECIDED to make their love known in action.

Megan wakes up every day and decides that she's going to love me. Mushy feelings can only get us so far, our commitment in marriage is rooted in our decision to love. And so in tonight's Gospel lesson Jesus DECIDES to express his love for the disciples by washing their feet, even the feet of Judas! Can you imagine?! Washing the feet of the person you know who has betrayed you? And yet Jesus does it, taking on the job of a servant to show the disciples how love is expressed in his decision to serve.

Last night in the our Lenten study we talked about the last chapter in N.T. Wright's book *Surprised by Scripture*. The challenge that we were left with was how to model Christ for others, how to meet others half-way, how one decides to serve. But another decision needs to happen first.

First, we need to let Jesus serve us. We need to have our own feet cleaned. Because in order to love we need to decide to be vulnerable. It's not easy! People worry if their feet smell, or look dirty, maybe they wonder if their sin is just too large, or maybe the fear of letting go is just too great. So they decided to remain in control, trying to dictate the rules of the game to Jesus. But Jesus and love do not work that way.

“Jesus asks nothing of the disciples other than that they place themselves completely in his hands, that they discard their images of who he is and how one comes to God and give themselves to his ministrations. He asks that they enter into relationship with him on his terms, that they allow their relationship with him to be defined by God’s love and God’s love alone.”³

It’s there in that decision that we see total love. A love that changed and continues to change the world all around us. So... What decision is God challenging you to make? Amen.

³The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Volume IX. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994. pp. 619.