

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Maundy Thursday - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Exodus 12:1-4[5-10]11-14

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

I Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

04/18/2019

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.

A Servant

Good evening! One of the places and experiences that was the most formative for my faith was the week I spent at Camp Luther, every year, in the middle of no-where in Cowen, WV. “Church camps” and other youth retreats remain the number one influence on why someone decides to go to seminary. Something about the atmosphere encourages kids to be who they’ve always wanted to be, not the box they think they need to fit into back at home or in school. After high school, I couldn’t go back to camp as a camper, BUT I could go as a counselor! I had my application in as soon as possible and spent the next few years as a counselor with middle school students and then the high school group. We had a great group of pastors who functioned as the teachers for the high school group (one of them was Pastor Wanda Childs, who jumped ship to the Virginia Synod and now serves on the western side of the state) and every year the teachers would come up with some fantastic ways to augment the teaching with hands-on experiences. Unfortunately, one year, that turned out to be washing some feet.

Let me set the stage for you. It’s late June and we’re at the end of the week. Everyone has gotten pretty comfortable with each other and so staying clean wasn’t the highest priority. To make matters worse, there wasn’t a single place in camp where they had air conditioning. This was especially true for where we had classes’ which was a 4H camp barn that was turned into a classroom for the one week a year that we took over the place. So we’re stinky, we’re hot, and then the teachers move all 125 of us out into the field to sit in one giant circle. This was about 11am, so it was starting to warm up, and the sun was beating down on us, making the whole no-shower thing a little worse. And then the teachers read the passage from the Gospel of John that we just heard, and then these three pastors came over to each counselor and washed our feet. Now Pastor

Randy came over to me, and the man didn't hold back! He scrubbed! And when he was done with my feet, he moved onto another counselor.

And then it was my turn. I took the water, the towels, and the basin and washed the feet of the small group I was leading for that week. I took my cue from Pastor Randy, and I scrubbed some feet!

Now Trinity Sunday is my favorite SUNDAY of the church year, but Maundy Thursday is definitely my favorite service. Why? Well, it's certainly not the washing of your feet. That's by far the worst part of the service for me. My back hurts, the floor is hard, and it's feet. But something about the way that Pastor Randy cared for me all those years ago made this passage of scripture come alive in a way that I just couldn't ever imagine.

If you have participated in the Wednesday evening Lenten book studies you would notice that tonight's text is a sort of climatic end to everything we had been studying. In tonight's texts one could summarize everything it means to be a member of a congregation. I would also argue that it works well to encapsulate the heart of the Christian message. If you want to know what it means to be a Christian, a congregational member, look no further than tonight's lessons. But who am I kidding! I'm preaching to the choir here, the people who show up for a Maundy Thursday service, the ones who show up for the weekly book studies during Lent, you all have heard this message a million times. So the problem that I faced for tonight is this: how to make you understand.

This congregation is full of introverts, but you all share one thing in common with Peter tonight. You have trouble letting go. Understand this: Jesus is being a slave when

he takes off his robe, and puts on a towel. The text leads us to believe that even in the poverty that the disciples found themselves in, it was still a common thing to have their feet cleaned by a servant at a meal. These slaves or servants would have been the lowest of the low, not even good enough to have real clothing, but simple towels to cover themselves. And in the midst of this meal, Jesus stands up, undresses, and starts washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus doesn't go about it like I will in a few minutes. No, he cleans all of their feet. Even Judas and Peter. His betrayer and the one who will deny him. We talk a lot about forgiveness and grace, but right here is an example of that love. Washing the feet of the man who will mean your death. Washing the feet of the one who will deny that he ever knew you. Washing the feet of a group of men who will flee in terror, leaving you to die on a cross. That's the kind of love that we see tonight.

But it doesn't stop there! This love grows and moves and continues on! Do you feel it in this room tonight?! It surrounds us, reminding us of the reason we come to worship in the first place, a reason we can sometimes forget.

St. Paul's is a congregation that works its butt off. We're a group that will serve in a variety of ways to a level that I honestly haven't seen anywhere else. But tonight you must be served. One commentator writes that "*The church can be the church only if it is washed by its Lord and participating in his love.*"¹ Like I said, you're a building full of Peters, but for the next few days, you're helpless. We sit here tonight like infants, unable to do the work that Christ has undertaken.

¹Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 277.

You are loved, so loved in fact that your sin has been washed away, forgiven, reconciled at no cost to you. As your feet are washed, as you come to the table, remember that God became flesh and blood and literally went through hell for you! God didn't do this to guilt you, no, God did it because God has known you since before you were in your mother's womb! How could God not give up everything for the ones that God loves? Tonight, with water, bread, and wine, you experience what it's like to be helpless again, St. Paul's. "*We will remember that the Communion table is a place where we can come — time and time again — to have our own ugliness lovingly touched and washed clean by Jesus,*"² Dr. Tisdale writes. Tonight we stand in awe, simple amazement at a love that refuses to let us go. A love that calls us in to share in that very thing that changed the entire world. And it all happens tomorrow, at the top of a hill, on the wooden beam of a cross. Amen.

²Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 279.