



## LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

### As I Have Loved You St. John 13

Fr. William Klock

March 29, 2018 – Maundy Thursday

In our Gospel this evening we read about Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room at Passover. John picks up the story after they had eaten, but our Epistle from First Corinthians reminds us of that strange Passover meal Jesus shared with his friends. He took the Passover bread and told them that it was his body, broken for them. He took the Passover wine and told them that it represented a new covenant that would be established in the pouring out of his own blood. The disciples knew that something holy and profound was happening, but they wouldn't understand what it was until a few days later. But Jesus illustrated what it was all about after dinner, as we read in the Gospel, when he humbly washed his disciples' feet. Washing feet was a normal, everyday thing, but it wasn't a normal, everyday thing for the master, the rabbi to wash the feet of his students and disciples. Washing feet was a job for servants, or if there weren't any servants, it was the job for the person of lowest status in the group. But Jesus humbled himself to the embarrassment of his friends. Peter tried to stop him, but Jesus insisted: If you won't let me wash you, you can't share in me—in my life, in my kingdom, in my mercy.

What's interesting is that even Judas had his feet washed by Jesus. At the beginning of the chapter John sets up Judas' betrayal of Jesus. The devil had entered him, John says, and had put it in his heart to betray Jesus. The amazing thing is that Jesus knew. Jesus declared to Peter, "If I've washed you, you are clean through and through—but not all of you." And John says that Jesus was referring to Judas. Jesus had washed his feet too, but Judas wasn't clean. Again, Jesus knew. As John continues later in the chapter, Jesus tells them outright: One of you will betray me. One of his

*friends* with whom he had shared this last supper, one of his *friends* whose feet he had humbly washed.

Bothers and Sisters, that says something about the nature of the Cross. It says something about the nature of Jesus' love. It says something profound about the way in which God's strength is made perfect in weakness. At the Cross, sin and death rose up to do their worst, human evil was concentrated in one place. As Lord of Creation, legions of angels were at his command. But Jesus let human wickedness fall on him with its full weight. For the sake of love—love for his enemies, love for those who rejected and reviled him, for those who scourged him, for those who drove the nails into his hands. Jesus took our sin and gave back love. Jesus washed the Betrayer's feet. And then, after giving such a dramatic illustration of this love, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples—and if we are Jesus' disciples, he's saying this to us too: As I have loved you, you are to love each other. This, he says, is how people will know you are my disciples. It's interesting that of all the things that we think of that mark us out as Jesus' disciples—going to church, praying, reading the Bible—the most important thing Jesus highlights here is our love for each other. Without that all those other things are meaningless.

But, again, think of Judas. Jesus washed Judas' feet. Jesus loved Judas. Brothers and Sisters, love is vulnerable. Love can be abused. Love can be betrayed. And—here's the thing—if our love can't be vulnerable, abused, or betrayed, then it's not really love. Think of the Cross and think of how Jesus got there. The crowds hailed him as King on Palm Sunday, but by Friday they were shouting, "Crucify him!" And it was one of Jesus' closest friends who betrayed him to the authorities. But everything in this last supper, including Jesus washing his friends' feet, points to the Cross. Jesus spent his ministry teaching and telling stories so that people would understand the kingdom of God, but here, when it comes to his very last day, in these last moments when Jesus knew he had to drive home the meaning of the Cross and the meaning of his death so that his disciples would understand what he was

doing and why it was important, Jesus didn't give them a theology lesson or an atonement theory. No. He gave them a meal and he washed their feet. We so often turn that around. We think of it all in terms of atonement theories and theology and then we tack on the meal. Jesus gave us a meal so that we would understand what he was about to do.

Think about the meaning of a meal. We can celebrate friendship with a simple meal and we can throw great banquets to celebrate important events—something like a wedding. And so it's for good reason that the Jewish people looked forward to the Lord's kingdom and his deliverance in terms of a great banquet. The world was a mess because of sin and rebellion and idolatry, but the Lord's Messiah would come and would set it all to rights. This is where that idea of "on earth as it is in heaven" comes from. The Messiah would restore Creation to the way the Lord had made it in the first place and that meant no more pain, no more sorrow, no more fighting thorns and thistles to grow food. As the prophets said, grapes would be so plentiful you could tie your donkey to a vine and not worry that he'd eat the grapes. Wine would be so plentiful that people could wash their clothes in it. When the King finally came, his kingdom would be like a great banquet—everyone would celebrate and everyone would have their fill. And so as Jesus prepared to go to the Cross, as Jesus prepared to let evil and sin and death do their worst so that he could defeat them on Easter morning, he shared a meal, a banquet with his disciples—a meal that we still share today as his disciples, as we look forward to his kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven, as we look forward to the Lord setting everything to rights.

But this wasn't just any meal. It was the Passover. It was the great festival where, each year, the Jewish people sacrificed lambs and ate unleavened bread as a way of remembering who they were as God's people and how he had rescued them and made them his own. In the Passover they remembered that they had once been slaves and how they had cried out to the Lord and he had delivered them. They remembered the blood on the doorposts, they

remembered the Red Sea. They remembered being set free to serve the living God. And now here in this last Passover meal Jesus points his friends to the Cross. This is a new exodus. But this time God isn't just bringing physical deliverance from Egypt; he's bringing deliverance from bondage to sin and death.

And then the foot-washing. We might think that we can just sort of show up at the meal—slipping in anonymously and then leaving, not really having a personal interaction with the bride or the groom. Some friends and I did that once when we were living in the dorm at Vancouver School of Theology during the summer. There were lots of weddings in the chapel and sometimes there would be a reception in the lounge. One of my friends suggested we crash the reception and see if anyone would say anything. No one did. We got a few odd looks, but the bride's friends and family assumed we were with the groom and the groom's friends and family assumed we were with the bride—and we managed to avoid the bride and groom. Some people think they can come to Jesus and to the kingdom that way, but in washing the disciples' feet Jesus reminds us that he didn't humble himself, he wasn't beaten, he didn't die in some big, general sense for all humanity. He did. But he also died very specifically each of us—for you and for me. The disciples were embarrassed. The master isn't supposed to wash his disciples' feet. God isn't supposed to humble himself and die. But that's how it has to work, because that's the nature of love. And if we will let Jesus wash us he will wash every part of us clean: the proud parts, the angry parts, the rebellious parts; and the sad parts, the lonely parts, the confused parts, the sick parts and all the parts we wish with all our hearts could somehow be made right. They can be. And so Jesus invites us: Eat this bread. Drink this wine. My body and my blood given for you. Let me wash you clean.

And there was Judas. Jesus didn't just offer himself to the eleven friends he knew wouldn't betray him. Judas was there too. And Jesus washed even his

feet, not grudgingly, not any less thoroughly than the feet of the others, but with the same humble love with which he washed the feet of John, his best friend. Brothers and Sisters, that's love. Again, love isn't love unless it is vulnerable, unless it's open to abuse and betrayal. The world doesn't understand this kind of love. The world tells us to love the people who will love us in return. The world tells us that if someone doesn't appreciate us, we should write them out of our lives. The world tells us not to give ourselves to people who will only take advantage of us. A while ago I came across a whole Facebook page devoted to memes expressing this sort of thing. "Don't set yourself on fire to keep someone else warm," said a banner across the top of the page. But Jesus gives us a very different model of love. Jesus shows us real love at the Cross as he gives his very life for the people who cried out, "Crucify him!" St. John says that Judas went out. He went out to betray Jesus. He went out and Jesus knew that the wheels were in motion. Nothing would stop his death at that point. And John says he started to speak. And he didn't speak about what a jerk Judas was. He didn't complain about how this friend whose feet he had washed had gone out to stab him in the back. He didn't warn his disciples not to make the same mistake he had in befriending Judas. No. Judas went out and Jesus began to speak, saying, "Now the Son of Man is glorified. Now God is glorified in him." Now the world will see what real love looks like and in that love God is revealed. In the Cross, as sin and death do their worst to Jesus, we see the most profound example ever of "on earth as it is in heaven". This is love.

And then Jesus says to his disciples—to them and to us: I'm giving you a new commandment. Love one another. *Just as I have loved you*, so you must love each other. Don't love the way the world says to love. Love the way I have taught you to love. And by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, because you love each other as I have loved you.

Let us pray: Gracious and merciful Father, your Son Jesus Christ girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples' feet; grant us the hearts to be servants to one another as he was a servant of all, who gave his life and died for us, yet lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.