

**Bread, Wine, and Clean Feet****St. John 13**

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March 28, 2024

Our world needs more than ever the story of Holy Week. The whole story of Jesus, just like the big story of Israel and her God, is a story about love. But on Tuesday, as I was mixing concentrated floor wax remover into a bucket of water and trying to figure out the right ratio to get the old wax off the floor, I was also thinking about how Holy Week takes this grand biblical theme of love and super-concentrates it for us so that we can't miss a single bit of it. From Jesus humbling himself on Palm Sunday and weeping over unrepentant Jerusalem, to this last Passover meal he shared with his disciples and his washing of their feet, to his death on the cross on Friday, the love of God is profoundly manifest in Jesus. And here, in the middle of Holy Week, after Jesus has shared this Passover meal with his friends and washed their feet, Jesus says to them, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He finishes saying, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34). People will know we are Christians, not because we have fish stickers on our cars, not even so much because we go to church or because we read our Bibles or because we pray or because we do all sorts of good things. Those are good things that help our witness along. But more than anything else, it is our Jesus-like love for each other that witnesses to the world that we belong to him. Why? Because our love for him and our love for each other is what, above all else, shows that God has filled us with his Spirit,

united us with his Son, and has begun his work of new creation in us—transforming us from the inside out. Love.

It's a funny thing that while we do read part of John 13 for our Gospel today, we don't read *that* part. It's that word "commandment", referring to the new commandment that Jesus gave his disciples, the word *mandatum* in Latin, that's where we get the name Maundy Thursday. But here Jesus prepares us for the events of tomorrow and here he shows us what real gospel love looks like. The world reduces love to good feelings and that love is following those feelings—doing what you want or even putting love for yourself first—sometimes even to the exclusion of others—especially people whom the world says aren't worthy of your love. But, Brothers and Sisters, Jesus shows us that love—real love—is just the opposite. Real love is vulnerable and real love is sacrificial—you can't have one without the other. We see this as Jesus washes his friends' feet, but then, too, in that scene at dinner as Jesus shares bread and wine with them. Imagine the shock on his friends' faces as Jesus said, as he does in verse 21, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." One of you who has followed me these three years, one of you whose feet I have just so lovingly washed, one of you will betray me. John doesn't say as much, but I would think there would be a lot of objections from his friends reclining around that table. John tells us that he was there, reclining next to Jesus and that Peter—maybe Peter was just morbidly curious, but I expect it was more that he was afraid it might be him and he wanted to know that it wouldn't be—but Peter leaned over to John and said, "Ask Jesus who he's talking about." John, I'm sure, was curious himself. Why would any of them betray Jesus? And so he asks, "Who is it, Lord?"

The room went deathly silent as Jesus took a bit of bread in his hand, looked around at them, and said, "It is he to

whom I give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." And they all watched as Jesus dipped the bread and reached out to give it to Judas. It seems pretty clear what Jesus meant, but maybe that's our hindsight. The disciples, John says, didn't understand. John, writing years later, says that it was at that moment that the satan entered Judas. Jesus sent him off to do what he had to do and to do it quickly. The disciples thought Jesus was sending him off to buy more bread or to give alms to the poor—since Judas was the treasurer for the group. So Judas left. The wheels were in motion. It was only a matter of time before the soldiers of the high priest would come to arrest Jesus. And knowing that, this is when Jesus announces, "Now is the son of man glorified and now God is glorified in him." God is about to be glorified in the betrayal and death of his son. God will be glorified in the cross of Jesus for so many reasons. I would say, first and foremost, because in it God reveals his faithfulness to his promises. But for Jesus, God was glorified in the cross first and foremost because the cross revealed his love—the same love that would then pour out of them, in the power of the Spirit, to each other and eventually to the whole world and, in that, would show that they belonged to Jesus.

And at the cross we see that godly love looks, again, very different from worldly love. Godly love is vulnerable and sacrificial. We see that prefigured in the upper room. We know the story already. Even the name, Judas, stands out. If someone was going to be betray Jesus, obviously it would be the guy named Judas. But, of course, that's because Judas ruined the name. But before Judas ruined it, his was a royal name. We might miss it because of so many things going from Hebrew to Greek to English, but Judas is the Greek form of Judah—ancestor of Israel's royal tribe. It was the name of the great hero who led the Maccabean revolt two hundred years before. It was the name of Jesus' brother—the one we

know (because of Hebrew to Greek to English and a little bit of wanting to distinguish him from Judas) as Jude. Judas was a royal name—even a hero's name. So the rest of the twelve were shocked and surprised when Judas betrayed Jesus, but Jesus knew all along what was in his heart. But that didn't stop Jesus from washing Judas' feet and sharing that Passover meal with him. It didn't stop Jesus from loving Judas and there we see what godly love is like.

So this last supper, as we call it, and Judas and his betrayal point towards the cross where we'll see the love of God on full display. And to explain to his disciples, consider what Jesus did. The last supper wasn't a theological symposium. Jesus could have done that. As much as we theologise and philosophise about the Lord's Supper you might think that's what happened that night—that Jesus sat down with his friends to talk theology and philosophy—not that those things are bad! But, no, when he needed to prepare his friends for the cross, when he needed to explain what it was going to mean, Jesus offered not a word of theology or philosophy. Instead, he gave them a meal and washed their feet—even the feet of the one who would betray him.

It was a meal. You can know lots of people, but there's something about sharing a meal that means you really know someone. You've been in that person's house. They've given you food. There's something intimate in that, something you don't get in most other settings. And there's something celebratory about a meal. The Prophets had spoken of the Messiah's kingdom in terms of plenty and bounty and in terms of a great feast and here, on the night before Jesus made that great act of sacrificial love through which God would begin his work of new creation, Jesus shared a foretaste of that great feast with his friends.

But it wasn't just any meal; it was the Passover. It was that meal in which

the Jews, eating the lamb and the unleavened bread, participated in the events of the exodus from Egypt, of the parting of the Red Sea, of the defeat of Pharaoh, of their meeting God at Mt. Sinai where he gave them his law, established his covenant with them, and made them his people. So this wasn't *just* a meal, it was the Passover and in that Jesus made the Passover the lens through which his friends—and now through which we—see his death on the cross and resurrection to life. In the events of Good Friday and Easter we see a new Passover and a new Exodus. Jesus becomes the new Passover lamb, who dies in our place. We pass through the Red Sea of sin and death and on the other side, in a new land, Jesus leads us to his Father, who pours out his Spirit on us and makes us the firstfruits, his advance guard of his new creation.

And finally, just in case any of us might think that we can be anonymous guests at the Lord's Table, there's the foot washing. As we hear John tell us about Jesus washing his friends' feet, we should have a sense of Jesus washing our own feet. There's something intimate in washing someone's feet. Try it for yourself in just a few minutes. There's something about it that leaves us more vulnerable while drawing us closer into relationship than even sharing a meal. It's awkward and uncomfortable and humbling and in light of that the cross becomes more than just a general symbol. In the foot washing, Jesus carries his cross to each one of us. In the foot washing Jesus says, "I did this for *you*. If *you* let me, I will wash you clean of every sin and every hurt, of everything that separates you from God and of everything that has broken you. I will heal your heart and I'll fill you with my own Spirit. Let me wash you and I will make you new. Come to my table. Eat my bread. Drink my wine. And let me wash you. Brothers and Sisters, that's what the cross is about.

And, again, there was Judas. Eating the bread. Drinking the wine. Jesus washing his feet even though he knew that Judas would betray him. That's love. That's the cross. And that's why, as Judas left the upper room that night to fetch the soldiers, that's why Jesus announced that he was about to be glorified and, in that, the Father too would be glorified.

Brothers and Sisters, think on that as we wash each other's feet and as we come to the Lord's Table. Here we know love like we have never known it before and like we can know it nowhere else. Here we know the love of God who gave his own life for the sake of those who had betrayed him. And as we come to know and manifest this love ourselves, we give glory to the one who first loved us. And that, my friends, is the vision of love that our world so desperately needs.

Let's pray: Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.