

Maundy Thursday Message  
April 13, 2017  
Text: John 13:1-17

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

*Now 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.*

*The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then 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.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

*Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."*

*Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."*

*Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"*

*Jesus 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."*

*For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

*After 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? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*

*Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

What a journey it has been. They have been through so much together, Jesus and the disciples. After three years of traveling together, teaching and learning, ministering, feeding and healing, they gather now on the eve of a set of events that will be so catastrophic they can hardly imagine it.

The divine dance between God and humanity as expressed through the life of Jesus has reached its critical moment. He knows his time has come. The shadows are lengthening and clouds of darkness are closing in from all sides. But it doesn't shake Jesus from his essence—an essence that John, the Gospel writer, describes as,

*Having loved his own who are in the world, he loves them to the end.*

He loves—through all. It's who he is; even if one of his own is about to turn on him. As they gather and sit for a meal, perhaps their last together, he knows one of them has been influenced and overtaken by evil. Money has been exchanged for betrayal. But it doesn't matter; Jesus doesn't put a stop to it. And he doesn't run. No, instead, here around the supper table, he takes one more opportunity to serve his followers, his disciples, his friends. He pours some water, grabs a towel, and washes their feet.

Feet get dirty. The ground we walk on is not clean. There's dust when the road is dry, and mud when the rain comes down. Trash is thrown on the path by uncaring souls, there's spit and there's chewing gum, and, in earlier times, all kinds of mess before the wonder of modern plumbing. But the ground beneath our feet also contains the blood of a thousand wars over time, spilled because of our inability to reconcile with one another. The ground on which we walk records the history of humanity's sin. This is what our feet are exposed to as we journey through this life. But it doesn't stop Jesus from being who he is. He loves his own and loves us to the end. He washes the feet. It's what he does.

It's as if he says, "I know where you've been, I see what you have stepped in, I am aware of the trouble you have gotten yourselves into. It doesn't matter. I will wash your feet anyway.

We can be like Peter and say, "No, not me. You're not getting near my feet." Because we all have a closely guarded part of us that no one gets near. And yet Jesus says, "Unless I wash your feet you can have no part of me." Letting him clean our soiled feet is what makes Jesus who he is.

But there is more to it. Foot washing is a picture of the Way. It's the living demonstration of laying one's self aside for the sake of another. It's the way of Jesus who says,

*"You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*

The time now approaches when he will be taken from his friends, removed from community, and isolated like a pariah, no longer able to teach, or to preach, to heal, to cast out demons, or to feed the multitudes. Can you hear the sound in the distance of hammers and saws? His moment of ultimate servanthood is being set before him, and he is allowing it. Yet before it happens, he pleads with his followers one last more to love one another, as he has loved them. Today he shows us how with a basin and a towel, tomorrow he shows us with the cross.

In all of history no one has seen this kind of love before. Who can even comprehend this kind of power, which emerges through lowering one's self? No one has ever known to what extent a loving God will go to bring humanity back to itself, back to the image of God in which we were created. No one has ever understood the essence of God until they have encountered the one who is called Jesus of Nazareth.

The moment is arriving, mockery awaits, torture is being planned, Golgotha beckons, and time will not be stopped. And Jesus says,

*Little 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.'*

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Amen.