

April 1, 2021

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St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Plant City, Fl.  
Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

**"Love For One Another"**

**In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen!**

**Jesus' journey to the cross is nearing an end. As John's gospel reminds us tonight, Jesus knew that the hour was almost upon him. The hour that he would depart from this world and go to the Father. Holy Scripture also tells us that *"... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."***

**Now, my friends, as Christians, we are beneficiaries of a well known story. As with many such stories, it's easy for us to forget about some of the essential details in those experiences. Like our gospel tonight. If we're not careful, our minds automatically skip, or jump, to what we know to be the decisive moment in the story - which is Jesus' death on the cross and subsequent Resurrection. However, I would caution us about making that leap too quickly.**

**There's more to it than just hearing that, *"... (Jesus) loved them to the end."* How exactly did Jesus do that? Was it simply a matter of Jesus being nailed to a cross and dying? I believe our gospel has more to say about that.**

**The more immediate beginning of the end for Jesus began when he entered Jerusalem, ostensibly there to participate in the Passover festival. On this night he has gathered his disciples together for one last meal. Yet, as we have heard, at Jesus' command, it is a meal that transcends into something far greater than a moment for physical nourishment. It becomes for us a meal that will have eternal ramifications for ages to come. But, Jesus doesn't stop there. That's just the beginning of the end. During the meal Jesus gets up, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, pours water into a basin and, moving from one disciple to another, he lovingly and tenderly, washes their feet. An act of not only practicality - the washing off of all of the dirt, the dust and the grime**

accumulated during a walk in daily living - but also an act of such intimacy, humility and servitude, that it would be hard not to imagine the disciples being overcome with emotion at Jesus' expression of such love.

As Jesus makes his way around the table, all seems to go well. Until he comes to Peter. Peter appears to rebuff Jesus' attempt to wash his feet. No surprise there, right? "*Lord,*" says Peter to Jesus, "*are you going to wash my feet?*" "*Yes,*" says Jesus. "*You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.*" And hard headed Peter responds, "*You will never wash my feet.*"

Now, my brothers and sisters, I want you to think about Peter's response for a moment. More than that, I want you to imagine yourselves in Peter's sandals. Really think about it, as if you yourself were Peter. What if it were your feet that Jesus wanted to wash? What would your reaction be?

Now, I don't know this for certain, but I believe I can take a pretty good guess. I think our hesitancy, like Peter's, is about more than having our feet washed. In fact, I don't think it's about our feet at all. I think it's more about unresolved feelings of vulnerability, a failure to acknowledge our human imperfections, deep seated pain, embarrassment, and uncertainty about our worthiness to embrace Jesus' command to "*... love one another as I have loved you.*"

My guess is that there were parts of Peter that he was withholding and afraid to confront. And not just from Jesus, but from himself. My guess is that Peter had secrets, a past that haunted him, a brokenness that terrified him, or memories that were too painful to deal with. For Peter, it might have been easier and less risky to just say no to a perceived, or troubled past. Just push it all away, ignore it, try to forget it, and hope it would leave him alone. Besides, who knows what might happen if he were to open the door to any one of those things?

My friends, do you know why that's my guess? For two reasons. First, because there have been parts of my own life that I just didn't want to face, or deal with. Parts of me that I had buried and wanted to alienate and exile. Memories and experiences that I did not want to offer a seat at the table of my life. I had slammed the door on them and declared them to be unwelcome visitors.

My second reason? Because, as a priest in Christ's Church, I have seen and heard those same things from hundreds of others, including some of you. I could never count the number of times someone has said to me, Father Barry "*I*

*am troubled, and I want to talk to you about something but I don't know if I can. I have never told anyone about this.*" Many times they found a way to do it - but sometimes they didn't - they just couldn't. I get it. I understand. And if you have even the faintest idea, or inkling, of what I am talking about, then you get it too.

Which brings me, and you, to Jesus' response to Peter. *"Unless I wash your feet, you will have no share with me,"* says Jesus. *"For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."* And, *"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."*

In 1989 Mother Teresa visited Phoenix, Arizona, to participate in the opening of a home for the poor. During her visit, she was interviewed by a local radio station. At a break, in a private moment, the interviewer asked Mother Teresa if there was anything he could do for her. He was expecting her to request a contribution, or possibly some additional media attention to help raise funds for the new home for the needy. Instead, Mother Teresa looked him in the eye and said, *"Yes, there is. Find somebody nobody else loves, and love them."*

My friends, tonight - the night before Jesus goes to the cross for us, Jesus reminds us once again of his great love for us. As we have so often done when Jesus offers to wash our feet, let's not back down this time - not tonight. Ask yourself, what are the secrets and memories about yourself that hold you back - whether it be something you've done, or something that has happened to you? Was it something you've never shared with anyone else, and that you never want anyone to know. Or, perhaps it was something that leaves you in fear of ever being found out. The kind of thing you wish you didn't know - the kind of thing you might be able to ignore, but can never forget.

What are the hurts and griefs you hold on to that are too painful to talk about? The very thought of them making your stomach churn and your eyes well up. Ask yourself, what is the guilt, the shame, the embarrassment, or failure, that you still carry around in your heart and soul every day? What are the same old arguments, feelings, and behaviors that continue to repeat themselves in your life? The ones that you try to excuse by blaming someone else, or saying, "That's just who I am," or "That's just the way it is." What is it that is really behind those things, begging to be acknowledged and dealt with?

Like Peter, think about the times you've said to Jesus, "You will never wash my feet?" And what that's really all about? My brothers and sisters, while we

might not be able to literally have our feet washed on this night, we can still let Jesus cleanse our hearts and souls.

There is no better time to address the fundamental challenges of our faith and our human nature. Don't let your fears, your struggle with humility, and the pride that so wants to master your very being, hold you back. Don't back down. Don't do it again. Not on this night. This is your night to come clean. The one Jesus offers us out of nothing but love. This is our night to be washed clean. This is our night to eat and drink in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for us. This is our night to lay it all on the table. This is our night to strip bare the altar of our life. This is our night to let the healing begin and the love to blossom.

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