

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday

March 24, 2005

He knew it would be the last meal he would share with all of them.

What would you do, what would you say, if you knew you were sharing your last meal with those you love? Would you be looking back – talking about good times you shared – asking forgiveness for ways you failed, or offended? Would you say a kind word to each one gathered there? Or a word of advice? Even a word of warning? Would things that have been left unsaid too long be left unsaid still then? Would you say to each, "I love you? I will miss you? I will be thinking of you? Would you kiss, embrace? Would you hold hands with one another and pray? What would you pray for? God's guidance for those you leave behind? God's welcome into the kingdom you hope you all would one day share? ~~Or would you pray that something could change and this last meal might not be the last?~~

That night when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father, he 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. One by one he washed their feet and lovingly dried them. In this deed of service he symbolized his whole life given for them. He told them, I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

I think most often that is what a mother would hope for when death comes to take her from her children – that they love one another. For years she would have been saying, "You need to get along with your sister, your brother. Watch out for one another – help each other." For she knows that they belong together.

So Jesus commanded those he loved to love one another.

We could have had a foot washing here tonight. I could have washed your feet, or you mine. Maybe we could do it still. Any of you have a particularly dirty pair of feet that need washing? Maybe you haven't changed your socks for a few days. You say your shoes could use some Odor Eaters? One of your socks has a hole in it?

You stopped the run in your nylon with nail polish? Don't worry, we are all friends here. We all belong to Jesus, he said to love one another. Let's wash some feet!

You say, Next year? Then you can clean up your feet and trim your nails and be wearing some new socks.
You can be ready.

Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

That would be easy to do if our feet were always clean. If you and I were always the kind of people who are worthy of belonging to the church of Jesus Christ that would be a snap. But sometimes I hear rumors of words we speak to one another. Harsh words, critical condemning words. Mean words, thoughtless words, even words intended to hurt. I hear some say that no one noticed when they were missing, or that no one greeted them when they arrived. You would think that among Jesus' followers who love one another these things would never happen. But among us they do.

Jesus could have had a hug-o-rama that night. Everyone embracing and speaking loving words. But instead he chose to wash stinking dirty feet. Maybe he knew something about how hard it is to love some people. Maybe he knew that lots of times when Mom dies the kids fight. One sister walks off with the special bracelet that the other sister wanted – didn't even ask – it just disappeared. A little squabbling over ~~her~~^{her} will host Christmas this year. And then there is dividing up the pictures – someone will be unhappy.

As he was washing their feet Jesus told his disciples, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Now we know that the foot washing symbolized Jesus giving himself on the cross. Dying for us because there was no other way to save us. No way to make us loving enough, and good enough, and kind enough. No way to divert us from our self-centered living, and violence and greed than to give his life on the cross. There he opened his arms to embrace us – God's children – held together in his outstretched arms.

Love one another as I have loved you.

The love Jesus calls you to this night is a love that does not give what is deserved but what is needed. We will all need to be loving like that, washing stinky feet, if this family of God is to stay together. Sometimes the family cannot be held together. Not even Jesus' washing Judas' feet could keep Judas from betraying. But Jesus desire for you is that you love one another. Just as he has loved you, that you love one another.

Tonight is another Last meal, most likely the last time every person in this room will be together at once. It is time to receive what our Lord gives here – to hear what he speaks – and to say and do for one another what we would want for our last earthly meal together. For we know that every meal we share may be just that. But because of the love of Jesus there will always be another meal, an eternal feast of his love.