John 13:1-17,34

Maundy Thursday

April 12, 1990

There is a picture on the bulletin board down the hall. I hope all of you have taken time to take a look. When I did I saw Pastor Jimmy Madsen of First Lutheran in Lorain, carrying a box of food. When I saw it this is the conversation I carried on within me;

 Doesn't he have something more important to do than to unload food from cars. We pastors need to set the right example, preaching, teaching, this is what we are trained to do. Sure the people like it when we are ready to pitch in with every little job that comes along, but there are other people who can do those things. Pastors ought to do pastor's work. Let others do the menial tasks.

You see, I know how the world works. If you folks see me carrying boxes you'll say, What a regular Joe he is. But you will also think, We're paying him to carry boxes? The stock boy at the grocery store does the same for a whole lot less. So I get upset when I see other pastors doing things that might make people think we don't have much to do. I know Jimmy, I know that whatever First Lutheran is paying him they are getting a bargain when it comes to quality of work, and dedication and commitment.

People will get the wrong idea when they see that kind of picture. It's like a surgeon washing out a bedpan, or the school superintendent doing lunchroom duty. Or Jesus washing his disciples feet.

We read, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded."

Here was the one who had been given all things by God, he had come from God, he was going to God, and he was washing dirty feet. Sweaty feet. Smelly feet. Maid's work, servant's work. Jesus' work.

Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet? You shall never wash my
Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." Peter said, 

Suddenly washing feet sounds like so much more. If I do not wash your feet, you have no part in me," sounds like baptism. Maybe Jesus is not washing away physical dirt at all, but spiritually cleansing his disciples, not a menial task, but a holy ritual.

That's what Peter thought. "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

But Jesus said, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean."

This was not a holy ritual, just washing dirty feet. The disciples were already clean in the spiritual sense through Jesus, but their feet were dirty and he washed them.

When he had washed their feet and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord and you are right for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you that you love one another.

Loving one another is not some warm feeling in the heart. It is not thinking kind thoughts. It is washing dirty feet, getting out of an office chair and picking up a box of food and carrying it to the poor. Loving one another is bathing one who is confined to bed, offering to sit with an elderly person while their regular care giver has a break.

In our world today we do not value very highly such deeds. Let a young man hit a ball four hundred feet and we will cheer him and shower him with money beyond imagining, while the nurses aid who does the truly heroic work is
Jesus washed the disciples' feet. And then he died for them. The Lord became the servant, the almighty became the slave of his creatures. And he said, I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Sometimes I think that I should be clothed in rags instead of these fine things that I wear before you. For then I might most clearly reflect the glory of the one whom I represent, Jesus. Instead of standing up here, high, towering over you, my place should be low, that I might most clearly reflect him who took the lowest place for your sakes. For Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Now he sends you to do as he has done to you. In his supper he enters you, to go out that door in you this night. He enters into you that he might in carry food to the hungry you wash dirty feet, and and continue to offer his life