

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

It was almost over. The darkness of night was approaching. The special meal was being prepared. But there was one more lesson to be taught that night. As they ate in near silence what were they thinking? They had been told what would happen very soon, yet I can't imagine they were prepared for the terror that was approaching. For the death that was coming... and death *was* coming. But not for them, no, not for them. Their Lord had promised death would pass over them. **"When I see the blood, I will pass over you"** he had told them. And as always, the Lord was true to his promise. Death came to every firstborn son in Egypt that night. From the son of the common man to the son of the king. But death could not touch those whose homes were marked with the blood of the lamb. The innocent sacrifice of the lamb freed God's people from slavery and death.

Almost 1500 years passed by. But the people still celebrated, still remembered. They still brought the year-old lambs into the city on Sunday. They waited till twilight on Thursday and then all the lambs were slaughtered. The meal was prepared just as it had been so long ago. The roasted lamb, the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread. This was *the* feast, *the* festival, that every Jew looked forward to. And Jesus was no different. He longed to eat this meal. To join with his disciples in the solemn celebration. He was eager to spend this time with those he loved so dearly. How Jesus must have savored that night, that meal... because he knew the terror that was approaching. He knew that death was coming... yes, *his* death was at hand. The **Firstborn of all creation** knew that death would not pass him over. But he also knew it was the only way. The innocent Lamb had to die to free the people from slavery. Only his blood would allow death to pass over.

Brothers and sisters, why are we here tonight? 'Well,' you might say, 'where else would we be? We are Jesus followers after all, his disciples.' 'We're here to receive the Lord's Supper, some of us for the first time.' 'We're here because this is our practice as Christians, we've been doing it for almost 2000 years.' Alright... but I hope you are here also to listen, to learn, to marvel at Jesus' love. If you are truly his disciple, and you are, then listen to the voice of your Teacher. In our Gospel reading this evening Jesus gives us a command: **Love one another.** This evening truly be a disciple and ***learn from Jesus' loving service to live in humble service to each other.***

As Jesus gathered with his disciples in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem everything would have looked quite ordinary. The room had been prepared. A table was set. Cushions to recline on were waiting. The food was ready. And the disciples were ready to recline at the table and enjoy this special meal. You have to wonder if any of Jesus' disciples had the smallest inkling of what was about to happen... about the significance of this night. Reading the account you strongly suspect they didn't. Their minds were on other things. They had been so busy arguing with each other about who was most important... so busy trying to claim the seat next to their Lord... that no one bothered to think about the task of washing up before the meal.

Many of us wash our hands before a meal. This was customary at Jesus' time too. But so was washing your feet. I guess we would wash feet too if we didn't have cars and were forced to walk dusty streets in sandals all day long. I can imagine people would enjoy their meal much more if the smell of dirty, sweaty, feet was not polluting the air. But on that night Jesus' disciples simply assumed a servant would be along shortly to do what was customary. Perhaps when Jesus got up from the head of the table and walked toward the waiting water basin and towel the disciples thought he might be assigning the task to one of them (then they would get to see at least one of their number drop his claim of being the greatest among them).

But things changed very quickly. You can almost hear the bickering being replaced by quiet. The disciples' mouths opening now in shamed silence watching the scene unfold. None of them wanted to serve the others. They all wanted to be #1. And now here was Jesus, their Lord, the Son of God,

bending down and wrapping a servant's apron around his waist. Jesus wanted to get their attention. I think it worked.

As he went from one disciple to the next, he took their soiled feet into his hands. He washed the dust and grime from the tops and bottoms of their feet, from between their toes. Can you feel their shame growing? He wiped them dry with his garment and silently went to serve the next one. Peter's words almost come as a relief to us, don't they? Someone had to say it. They were all thinking it, right? **Lord, are you going to wash my feet?** Jesus responded calmly to Peter's indignation, "You'll understand what I'm doing soon enough." Of course that wasn't good enough for Peter, "**No! You shall never wash my feet!**" Jesus speaks a bit more pointedly to Peter now, "**Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.**"

But Peter still did not get it, as evidenced by his sudden desire to have Jesus give him a bath. Peter didn't see that Jesus was using this as an opportunity to remind him and the other disciples that they needed to be cleansed of more than just the dirt on their feet. Unless Jesus makes a person clean, spiritually clean, they can have no part with him.

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he was giving them a tiny glimpse of the humiliation and shame that he would soon suffer. Jesus was in his final hours. His betrayer sat among them. He knew that all authority was his. He knew he would soon return to his Father. And yet his thoughts, his words, his actions... they were all focused on those he loved. If ever there was a time for him to think about himself, this was it. The disciples should have been washing his feet, doing anything they could to help prepare him for what was coming. But it was Jesus who was preparing his disciples. Jesus who had always put them first, always shown them his love, was loving them still, loving them right to the end.

As Jesus stooped down to wash their feet that night, the disciples knew things were out of order. How would they feel then as Jesus bent over in a few hours and gave his back to a whip? If washing their feet gave them pause, what was going through their minds when they heard about the death sentence that was passed? They thought *this*, washing feet, was humiliating!? Then what would you call being stripped and nailed to a piece of wood? The disciples had never really understood what Jesus meant when he told them he would suffer and die. They couldn't wrap their minds around the truth that the Lord, the Son of God, would become the slave – so that the slaves to sin could become sons of God. When the disciples looked back on these events later in their lives, did tears fill their eyes as they remembered what their Lord did for them?

What about you? Jesus served you too. He washed away the filth not from your feet, but from your heart, not with water, but with his blood. He gave up his body, which you will eat in the Sacrament tonight. He shed his blood, which you will drink. We celebrate tonight the new feast that Jesus instituted that evening. We eat the sacrifice, the Lamb of God. His blood covers us and death passes over. Everything Jesus did on Maundy Thursday was for us. He was determined to show us his love. To help us remember his love after he was gone. – His selfless, underserved, love. His love which burned for us, desiring only our good, our salvation.

Jesus thought of nothing else in his final hours than what we needed. He remembered us and he acted for us. What do you take away from this loving service? What have you learned from your Teacher? How will you remember Jesus?

Jesus instructed his disciples after washing their feet, and he instructs us too, when he said, "**I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. A new command I give you: love one another.**" At first glance this command does not seem new at all. **Love one another?** God had laid this law down in the Old Testament. Jesus had repeated this law many times already. What did Jesus mean, calling this old commandment **new**? Well, he tells us: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

You see, there is a new motivation for us to love. There is a new perspective we have after seeing Christ's love. We love because Jesus has shown us what it really means to love. Real love is service and sacrifice. This is how Jesus loved us. Inspired by this love of our Lord we too will live in humble service, reflecting Christ's humility and selfless love.

Do you remember when those WWJD wristbands and bumper stickers were all the rage? WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? I think you still see that slogan around, don't you? I know some Christians didn't like that slogan because a lot of people focused only on Jesus as an example for living instead of a sacrifice for sin. But we know that Jesus was really both wasn't he? And so I think that slogan can be helpful for us as Christians as we seek to live God pleasing lives that serve others. What would Jesus do?

Think about all of the situations in life where you are tempted to put yourself first and others last. To look out for your own interest. We like to be served, don't we? We want it our way, right away. We want to kick back after a hard day's work while she makes my supper. We want him to come home after work and listen to *me* as I tell him about how hard *my* day was. We want to watch TV while the kids do the dishes. We want to sleep in on Saturday while mom or dad does the lawn. We want a new phone or new clothes so we can fit in, maybe even be cooler than most. We want the closest parking spot. We want everyone on the road to get out of our way. We want recognition at work. We want a raise. We want our taxes lowered. We want our retirement accounts secured. We want others to stop getting a free ride off the government because they are taking my money that I could be using for me. We want the big house, the nice car, the TV, the toys... Get the picture? It's an ugly one. Self-centeredness grows on itself, doesn't it? Jesus' 12 apostles were not the only ones who wanted to be #1, who wanted to have it all.

And where is the solution? Where is the cure? It's in Christ. He selflessly served us by offering his life for ours. What a trade! We don't like to trade in anything of value. Christ traded in his life for us. As Christians, in all walks of life, let's gather some much-needed perspective from Jesus' actions. Jesus' body was broken for us, his blood shed for us. What will we do as we remember him and his sacrifice? And what will our attitude be? Will we serve grudgingly? No. **As I have loved you... As I have loved you** Jesus said. That is how we will love each other.

Jesus demonstrates true greatness, true love, true service. How can we who have been shown such mercy, been given such grace, do any less? Live in humble service to each other. Love each other completely, constantly, selflessly. Serve without thought of recognition or repayment. Give up what you have so that others can have more. Show the world, show each other, that Jesus has left his mark in your life, that you have been covered with the blood of the Lamb. Love one another as he has loved you. And rest in that love of Jesus tonight and throughout this weekend as focus on our Savior's amazing sacrifice. Amen.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. Amen. (1 John 4:10-11)