

Maundy Thursday B 01 April 2021  
John 13:1-17, 31b-35  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*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. 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... I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. Let's pray:*

Boy, o boy. Haven't we been waiting for this night!?! It's two years since we last gathered here for Maundy Thursday.

During Lent, I've been thinking about the connection between Maundy Thursday and foot washing. There'll be no foot washing tonight and I think there's something to be learned from that.

One of the things that struck me as I thought about tonight and this liturgy, is that Maundy Thursday just might be the original liturgy of physical distancing. Even when we're able to gather in person, many don't come to this liturgy and of those who do come, I think only some of you would take off your shoes and socks and place your feet in my hands. And, I suspect, even fewer would be willing to take someone else's feet into their hands. When it comes to feet, we tend to keep our distance.

Sure, I might be completely wrong. But the point I'm belabouring is that I don't think hesitancy and distancing around Maundy Thursday has anything to do with feet. I think it's about intimacy and vulnerability. It's about opening ourselves to receive the life of another. It's about entrusting and giving our life to another. That's what Maundy Thursday is really about.

Maundy Thursday has never been about feet. Jesus is setting us an example. Washing feet isn't the point of this evening; it's only a pointer to something more expansive. Love is the point, the only point of this evening.

"If I, your Lord and Teacher," Jesus says, "have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Substitute the word love where Jesus speaks about washing feet and you have this: "If I, your Lord and Teacher have [loved you], you also should [love one another]." Sound familiar? You know those words. You've read and heard them before. They're Jesus' own words:

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

That's the new commandment – or in Latin the new *mandatum* – "that you love one another." It's what makes Maundy Thursday maundy. So, what does this love look like?

- We've all seen the masked faces of doctors and nurses who continue to show up knowing they're putting themselves and their families at risk? Those are faces of love.
- Do you hear a different tone, a deeper sincerity, when someone now asks, "Are you okay? Do you need anything?" That's a voice of love.
- We've all heard about people who have sewn masks at home, delivered groceries to neighbours, organised food distribution for their community, or made humorous videos about life today. Every one of those is an act of love.
- Are you noticing and giving thanks more often for the essential and often anonymous workers who keep things going – defence personnel, police officers and other essential service workers, shop assistants, utility workers, posties, council workers? The eyes of love don't miss a thing.

- If you wore a mask at any stage, I hope you still managed to smile at people even when your face was covered. Even if it wasn't seen or recognised it made a difference. "Love never ends."
- Have you listened to the news, heard horrible statistics, or shared someone's story about what's happened, and you just broke down and wept? Love can break your heart.
- And what about those angels of the night, who go about silently and unnoticed, extending a hand of friendship to, wrapping an arm of comfort around, and providing food and warmth for the homeless? Their patience, kindness, and generosity St Paul reminds us, is love.
- During the worst of the lockdown, I heard numerous stories about people ringing, texting, and emailing others, including myself, words of hope and encouragement saying, "Everything will be okay." In fact, David regularly sends me emails containing extraordinary images of the created world and inspiring acts of faith and commitment. I treat every one of those contacts as a testimony that "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."
- And when the worst restrictions were imposed on us, I felt the full force of the saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder. I now perceive that creation is more beautiful, life is more wonderful, and people are more precious than ever before. Love changes everything.

Something is happening in the world today. Our lives and our world have changed, and are continuing to change. The pandemic has played a large role in this but it's more than that. In the midst of this sadness, illness, and loss, it's Maundy Thursday. There's a new and growing openness and vulnerability toward one another. There's a deepening desire and longing for intimacy with others, ourselves, and God.

All throughout the world, this country, this city, your life and mine, feet are being washed in a myriad of different ways. And it only took a pandemic to remind us of what really matters. Let's never forget again. Let's never walk away from this night again. Let's never, ever, stop loving, just as Jesus never, ever stops loving us. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will love and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.