



## Maudy Thursday, March 28, 2024

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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**John 13:1-7, 31b-35**

*“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” We are called to live into the way of God Jesus manifested, not to create him to be a God of our own making.*

I'd like you to think for a moment about those gathered around you whose feet you knelt or sat before as you held and washed their feet. What thoughts and feelings went through you?

Did you say a prayer for them? Maybe you recalled your friendship with them over the years, worshiping together, doing ministry, laughing or crying together . . .

Maybe you touched the feet of someone you hardly know. How did that feel?

How did it feel to have your feet touched and washed by another person, kneeling at your feet? Did you sense their love, their care? Were you able to let go of the desire to be in control and simply allow yourself to be vulnerable to another's care? To fully receive that love?

I wonder what *Judas* thought and felt as Jesus came to *him* on his knees, taking first one foot into his hand and then the other, to scrub off the dirt and grime of the miles they walked together in ministry.

Did he flinch away in shame? Try to remain patient and go through the motions of this ceremony even as his mind was trained on the moment when he would hand Jesus over to the officials with a kiss? Was his heart twisted with disgust for Jesus?

John the Evangelist doesn't speak of this foot-washing interaction directly. He only lets us know that the devil had already put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus and that Jesus was fully aware of where all this was headed.

And even so, even with that awareness, Jesus still knelt before him. He still took his feet and scrubbed them clean. He still offered Judas a chance to have a “share” in who he is and what he is about—a share in God's Way of love.

The tragic truth is that Judas couldn't accept, receive, or reflect a God who would take off his outer robe, put on a towel, and scrub dirty feet. A God who would manifest his almighty power in humility and service. A God who would wash the feet of one who, in any other circumstance, would be his enemy.

Fr. James Martin suggests that Judas believed that Jesus *was* the Messiah—the truth of God’s presence in the world. Only, he couldn’t get past his own idea of what God’s presence should look like and how he *should* be God.

Jesus was taking too long to fully reveal his power as Messiah—the one who would forcefully overthrow the Roman occupiers, who would bring back the glory days of King David. The one to rule in true power and might with a sword in hand, so the Jews would never be oppressed again. The one who would bring them lasting freedom.

Maybe all Jesus needed was a little “push”—to be arrested—*then* the rubber would hit the road and he would show forth his true power. Then he would come down off that cross and demolish the Romans once and for all.

Surrounded by the other disciples sitting barefoot before the Master, Jesus holds Judas’ feet in his hands. They are so close, yet, tragically, worlds apart when it comes to understanding who God is and what God is about.

Jesus calls his disciples—and us—to live into his own example and love one another. While Judas wants Jesus to be a God *of his own making*. A God he can, in some way, control.

On the surface, Jesus’ call to love one another sounds pretty simple—especially when we consider loving people who resemble ourselves in age, economic status, race, or political and social ideology. How easy was it for you to love the people whose feet you washed tonight? Some who are your family or who have been your friends for years?

Now, I want you to imagine kneeling before the feet of someone from whom you are estranged. Touching the feet of someone who hurt you; someone you just can’t quite forgive. Someone who isn’t sorry for the hurt they caused you.

Imagine washing the feet of the people who drove by the those visiting Couer d’Alene last Thursday for the NCAA women’s basketball tournament. Spewing racial slurs, revving their engines, and flying the Confederate flag as they followed those women through the streets of *this* city.

I admit, I find myself pulling away in disgust when I think of treating people like that with any kind of care. Part of me wants to begin to construct walls around who deserves God’s love and respect and who just *doesn’t*—with *me* in charge of deciding who is “in” and who is “out” when it comes to God’s grace.

But that would mean turning Jesus into a God of my own making—at least in part. It would be playing right into the hands of the devil’s favorite weapons—hate and fear. And hate and

fear ultimately, only beget more hate and fear, leading us all down a dark and destructive road—far away from the Kingdom of God.

But Jesus calls us to follow, not our own notions of God, but him: to live fully into \*his\* way of love: In his example of washing the feet of *all* of his disciples, and in the many examples he shared with us of what it means to love as God loves throughout his ministry and his passion. To be clear, this kind of love doesn't command us to condone acts of evil. We are *always* to speak out when wrongs are committed, and others' humanity is threatened and demeaned. We are not called to willingly accept violence done upon us or others or remain in relationships that are violent or abusive.

At the same time, we are called to treat everyone as a subject, as a beloved child of God with a complex life and experience—not an object that can easily be categorized and dehumanized. We are called to always respect the humanity of every person—even those who would hate and demean us or others. Even our enemy.

In what ways might we at St. Luke's be called to wash the feet of those who might be our enemies? What ways are we called to reach out into this broken world, dominated by hate and suffering, and let people know what the love of God really looks like? How are we called to listen with the heart of God to those struggling under the weight of oppression and those struggling under the false God of hate and prejudice?

In what ways do we turn Jesus into a God of our own making—when we would have Jesus act in ways that reflect what we expect of God rather than who God truly is? In what ways do we try to control our God for our own purposes?

This is not an easy lesson. And I admit, I don't have all the answers to these questions. I only know that Jesus set for us an example of what it means to follow God—the true, blessed, glorified one—and that Jesus is with us as we strive to see him more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly as we live into his Way of Love.

“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.” Amen.