

***Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church, Chattanooga***

***Maundy Thursday: April 14, 2022***

***The Rev. Rachel Eskite***

*[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]*

Jesus and his disciples are gathered around the table at the Passover meal. The lectionary fleshes this event out—gives us the Eucharistic tradition as handed down by Christians through the words of Paul as he addresses the Corinthians, and then John adds to the meal a foot washing.

We get Jesus loving his people until the end. He feeds them—body, mind, heart, and soul, and then shows them what it means—truly means—to be in service to another.

The act of foot washing is strangely intimate, tender and caring in a way we don't often think about.

When I first entered the process for ordination, I took an episcopal 101 class at my sending parish, and one of the things the group did together was wash one another's feet. It was, by far, my favorite thing we did in the class together. It felt so loving, like holding a baby bird, to care for someone's feet.

To sit at someone's feet, is to show humility, is to be willing to listen to that person, is to grant that person agency on that part of their journey. Serving someone is not the top-down thing we often think it is or see it as—it is something entirely different to give out of our material abundance than it is to give out of the abundance of our hearts by kneeling down to wash another's feet.

*You are not better than those to whom you are called to serve*  
Jesus reminds them, reminds us.

*Love one another as I have loved you,*  
Jesus shows us what this type of love is.

*The one whom we call Lord is washing our feet,*  
we should go and do likewise.

This is the kind of self-emptying, the kind of radical shift in world view Holy Week prepares us for. Jesus prepares us for the kind of love God calls us to through the holy act of washing the feet of those who follow him.

But feet are kind of weird. We don't like to think about our feet—would rather hide them and not let others look at them.

We take our feet for granted. The ability to walk is not assured, but I know even I forget that.

It makes us uncomfortable in some way to have our feet washed. It feels disarming, strangely intimate. Perhaps it feels unnecessary, luxurious, or perhaps even extravagant.

Like a couple of weeks ago when Mary uses her hair to wash and anoint Jesus' feet with costly perfume. Such extravagance seems unseemly, especially when the world is so chaotic and uncertain around us, when really it tells us about God's own extravagant love and how through simple acts, we can show such love to another.

And it is by showing this love, the love that Jesus shows us, that we continue to proclaim the Lord.

Peter outright voices his discomfort when he tells Jesus 'you will never wash my feet.' And then when Jesus corrects him, he goes too far, and says "not only my feet, but my hands and head also.'

Yet, again, missing the mark, but always eager to be present with Jesus, even in his moments of forgetfulness and doubt.

Jesus is passing on his mantle as he is gathered around the table. He is passing on the intimate, tender, and all-encompassing love of God by choosing to be in service to those who have served. It is sort of jarring to imagine Jesus being the one to wash our feet, but that is the invitation here—we are invited to invite Jesus to love and care for us in this tender way.

We are invited to show Christ's love to one another because the only way Christ's humble and self-emptying love continues in this world of chaos, uncertainty, and despair is through us, is through these small moments of grace, is through the times we are present with one another and let our guard down enough to let the Spirit show up and guide us.

If Holy Week is about anything, it is about being willing to let our guard down enough to experience—truly experience and feel—the final days of Jesus as if we are really present. As if we are putting these last days back together in our hearts and living them out in the flesh.

Our feet are washed before we strip the altar and scatter like the disciples did after Jesus was arrested, before we walk with Jesus to the foot of the cross, before we stand and witness the horror and shame, before we sit vigil at the tomb, before we get to Easter.

Our feet are washed to show us the all-encompassing, self-emptying, tender, caring love of God, and in turn we lift up our hearts to God in service to one another.