

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh  
April 1, 2021- Maundy Thursday (B)  
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

**Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1, 10-17 ; 1 Cor 11:23-26 ; John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**"I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22.27) †**

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Tonight, we celebrate the Lord's last night at supper with his disciples... when he demonstrated to them what it means to be a servant and what it means to love. That quote I just read comes from the parallel story of the last supper, in the Gospel of Luke instead of John. It's Jesus' response to his disciples' dispute among themselves, over which of them is the greatest and most important. His response is clear: 'I am among you as one who serves.' This is demonstrated by Jesus, from his birth as one of us and baptism, through his teaching and healing, to the 'messy stuff' we don't like to think about: his suffering, the broken body and the blood and, oddly enough... the towel and the basin.

Jeremy Taylor, the great Caroline Divine and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Father of our Anglican Faith, wrote that on *tonight*, Maundy Thursday— God 'lays everything aside.' And I think he's right.... Jesus said, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'

The washing of the disciples' feet was an extraordinary act... unexpected... and uncomfortable. The washing of one's feet is very personal. People in those days wore sandals (if anything) and their feet were covered with dirt and dust from the road, layered in muck from streets. Even in households of wealthy people, it was rare for slaves to wash the feet of their masters; it was a very menial thing; something one did for oneself. In a society based on hierarchy, Jesus' act seemed inappropriate to his disciples. He was their leader, their teacher; it was scandalous by their standards, hence Peter's strong reaction. It's easy to say we would act differently... Peter, like many of us, engaged a society fixated on power and authority. His agenda was the world's agenda, and he objected in the same way many of us do, when certain actions don't meet our expectations. Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet seemed degrading, but it wasn't about self-humiliation, it was about beginning the transformation of a sinful, selfish world—one based on power and control— into a kingdom of vulnerability and of love. 'Do you know what I have done?' Do you understand?

How odd that John's Gospel speaks of 'glory' as soon as Judas leaves to betray Jesus. In fact, this Gospel insists that the foot washing and the betrayal are somehow part of Jesus' glorification. "Now the Son of Man has been glorified...God has been glorified in him and will glorify him at once." How strange to equate that menial service, and the betrayal & humiliation to come, with glorification! The point is that God is glorified in many ways, even ways that appear to us to be hopeless and wrong, for God's love transcends everything.

Jesus never denied his superiority... he didn't hide the differences of nature and grace between he and the disciples, "You call me teacher and Lord... and you are right, for that is what I am" (13.13). Jesus didn't deny his authority, he transcended

it. Jesus washed the feet of his followers, including Judas, and profoundly changed the relationship he had with them. He showed them true love and also made them uncomfortable... *so often, that's what love does.*

Jesus changed the relationship he had with his disciples and his love transformed what might have been a degrading act into one of service and friendship. His simple act on that last night with his disciples, taught them that they were equals, called into a mutual loving relationship with each other. His command, his *mandatum* (from which we get the term 'Maundy Thursday') is simple: "Love one another as I have loved you." Not one of you is greater than the other, not one of you is better than another. I have come as one who serves, who gives, to show you that **all** are equal in the eyes of God— poor refugees and rich business owners... those with dark skin and those with light skin... gays and straights... Democrats and Republicans... those in power, and those on the margins. All are equal in God's eyes.

He loved his disciples and loved them to the end. For immediately after this intimate gathering, there followed a rapid sequence of events— the transition from cheering crowds to jeering crowds... from praise to mocking... from intimacy to suffering and horror. Try to imagine how you may have felt as one of Jesus' followers on that night... how their world was torn apart, how everything turned dark when he was taken from them. At the end of this evening's service, we'll experience this symbolically, as we strip the altar of all color and decoration, darken our sanctuary, and leave in silence. Dark, harsh, and uncomfortable... Not to make us sad, to remind us: God is glorified in many ways, even ways that appear wrong to us, for God's love transcends everything. 'Do you know what I have done?'

Tonight, 'God lays everything aside' ... and the prevailing forces are rejected, power and privilege are subdued, dominion is replaced by equality, and love and humility are shown to be the mark of true discipleship! 'Do you know what I have done?' 'Do you understand? I have shown you love!

His followers were told on that night... and we are told tonight— "They will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another" (13.34). Tonight our God 'lays everything aside,' and commands each of us to do the same.

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