

Welcome

Welcome by the grace of God. Thank you for joining us, especially those of you who come occasionally or have only begun to be part of our community. We welcome you and pray for each of you to know and experience God’s love and grace. If we can help you take a step on your spiritual journey, please speak with me after the service.

Pastoral Prayer: (GBOD)

As Jesus prayed the night he washed his disciples’ feet, so we now pray: make us one, as you are one, Triune God.

For boldness to speak and live the truth, protection in the face of harm, and mercy to forgive all who harm us: make us one, as you are one, Triune God.

For growth in holiness through your word, commitment to compassion and justice for all people, and love for one another as you have loved us: make us one, as you are one, Triune God.

With all among whom you send us, people who are sick, homeless, or in prison, with leaders and those with means and influence, and with those who reject or do not know your love: make us one, as you are one, Triune God. Amen.

Benediction

This is the night of love. Go forth in the strength of this feast, in the care of this community, and with the love and blessing of our Triune God. Amen.

John 13:1-17 (NRSV)

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And 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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

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. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Message: Spiritual Washing

Do you know what I have done to you? Jesus asks those who follow him that question. He asked the disciples, including Judas, on his last night with them. The question wasn't addressed just to Jesus' followers at that dinner table long ago. Jesus asks us the same question today.

Do you know what I have done to you? Jesus asked the disciples that question right after he finished washing their feet, when he had dressed and was sitting at the table again. It's an important question.

Do you know what I have done to you? Jesus is asking that question tonight through God's living Word. What's your answer? I'm not talking about the Sunday school answer – he washed our feet to teach us humility. That's a good response, but that's milk, even children hear and understand that part of the lesson.

Jesus washed the disciple's feet to set an example. But he was revealing something deeper as well. And it's the deeper meaning that calls to us, whether we understand it or not.

What's Jesus asking? I think there are two obvious parts. First, let's examine the situation a bit and see how it relates to us 2,000 years later. Were the disciples' feet dirty? Yes, of course. Did they need washing? Certainly. Was the task an unpleasant one? Yes. It was assigned to the lowliest of servants. That's because everyone else would see the task as being “beneath” them. Washing someone else's feet (or hands) puts us in a submissive position. And no one, has ever like that position. We prefer to be waited on, cared for, even pampered.

Are we willing to freely give up our position at the head of the table to place ourselves in the lowest position in the room? No. Our self-interest, or you might say, self-love, is too strong. That's true for everyone here, from children to pastor to member or guest. It's the reason there was a fall from grace in the first place. We're made in the image of God, a great gift. Unfortunately, we want to act like God. We'd rather have others submit to and obey us, instead of seeing ourselves as those who are to submit to and obey God, even if it means we have to give what we have to others and take a lesser role.

The greatest sin of humanity is pride. We know it. We teach it to our children, saying “pride goes before the fall.” To make things worse, even when we know and try to resist, we struggle. Paul knew the depth of our struggle. He wrote, *“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate”* (Romans 7:15).

When we’re filled with pride, we’re anything but humble. When we’re filled with pride, we’re unable to hear the cries of those in need. When we’re filled with pride, we self-righteously justify our actions, even when they are wrong. When we’re filled with pride, our agendas and priorities dominate. We’re the ones who appoint ourselves as judges and decision makers, even when we have no stake. When we’re filled with pride, we can’t see our wrongdoing.

That’s where the second, and more important, part of Jesus’ lesson is revealed. What do we have in common with the disciples? Pride. Jesus’ lesson had little to do with the dirt on our feet or hands. That dirt is symbolic of deeper, more challenging stains. Jesus wasn’t just washing the feet of the disciples. He was giving them a lesson they wouldn’t understand until later.

Jesus’ lesson: he came to wash our spirits clean. Jesus became human to set us free from the sins that shackle and bind us. In our pride, we focus on our own selfish motives. Paul tells us what it leads to: *“sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good, idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry, jealousy, drunkenness, [excessive] partying, and other things like that”* (Galatians 5:19-21). Sadly, those who focus on their own self-interest don’t know why they’re on a path to a life of constant conflict, stress and darkness. It’s the path the world is on. It’s the path of spiritual darkness and death.

Jesus’ shows us another way. It’s the path to light and freedom. It’s a spiritual way of life filled with *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23). That’s the deeper lesson. Jesus tells the disciples he’s has a divine appointment with God’s glory. The way to that divine appointment is through suffering, humiliation and a death we can’t imagine.

Do you know what I have done to you?

Jesus knew what was about to happen. The prophesied hour had come. So Jesus poured himself into the disciples, showing them love in a gentle, quiet and humble way. Jesus showed those who would follow, then and now, how we're to live: caring for one another with sacrificial love. The way of Christ is love. Betrayal, denial and self-interest don't matter. Jesus loves us in spite of our faults, fears and failures. Jesus' time with the disciples in the upper room follows a divine script so powerful it changes the world forever.

The final part of the divine drama happened at the end of the meal. John's gospel doesn't tell us the signs and words Jesus used. Instead, John focuses on what Jesus did. John 13:34b-35 tells us Jesus gave us a new commandment: “... *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.*”

Love is the key. Jesus offered himself, willingly and freely, to free us from the power and control of sin. All we have to do is simple: truly believe Jesus is our Lord and Savior and accept his love and grace. Jesus renews all who come to his table.

How do you know when someone has truly given their heart to Christ? It's easy. They're filled with love. They show that love by caring for others at home, in the neighborhood, at church, in our community and in other parts of the world. It's not something you can fake. Best of all, that kind of love isn't limited to what one person can do. When we come together as a community of faith, hope and love, there are no limits to what God's Spirit will do.

Tonight we gather to remember, celebrate and look forward. The Lord's table is a table of love, forgiveness, grace and mercy. There's no judgment, condemnation or shame present. No matter what we have done, who we are or what we feel, anyone who truly wants to know Jesus can come to the table. It's the safest place in the world. It's a place free from prejudice, hatred, evil or apathy. Those who freely and willingly gather, seeking to be right with God, are received as children, filled with love and grace, washed clean spiritually.

We gather at the table to be renewed by the love of Jesus. That’s what changed the world, because God’s love didn’t end on the cross or in the tomb. God’s love is so powerful it overcomes death, the forces of darkness and our own doubts and fears. Jesus opened the way to a new relationship with God and others. Let’s embrace the spiritual washing Jesus offers to us today and every day. Trust God. Confess your pride and self-interest to Jesus and be washed cleaned. Ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you and change your life. Your heart will be changed.

I invite you to come to the table tonight as you are. Acknowledge your fear, admit your faults and embrace your feelings for you are in the presence of God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Be renewed together, loving brothers and sisters in Christ, to God be the glory!

In Jesus’ name, amen.

John 13:31b-35 (NRSV)

Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ **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.**”