

Called to Serve

[1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#), [John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#)

Tonight is Maundy Thursday in the Christian calendar.

The word “Maundy” is derived from the Latin word for “command.” The “Maundy” in Maundy Thursday refers to the command Jesus gave to the disciples at the Last Supper, that they should love and serve one another. We pause to remember Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf.

In Jerusalem as in most places in ancient Palestine, people used manual transportation on a regular basis – they walked. Roads were cleared and somewhat modern for the times, hence they were fairly flat but were dirt roads; not the nice paved roads we complain about in the spring when we see potholes left over from winter. When guests were brought into a household, a traditional custom of Jesus’ time was for a servant to be prepared to wash guest’s feet. This was usually the lowliest

servant in the household. Obviously taking on the chore of washing feet was not the most pleasant of jobs.

Jesus had sent his disciples to prepare a place for them to celebrate the Passover feast. I'm thinking that part of that preparation was to have the elements available to perform the traditional foot washing chore. Yet there is never a mention of a servant among those sharing a meal with Jesus. Perhaps there was someone there in the background, yet it seemed that Jesus was intent on spending his final hours on earth in the presence of his disciples. It seems appropriate that Jesus was alone with his disciples during this time.

So you can imagine the disciples looking at one another, knowing that the traditional foot washing chore needed to be done. I can picture the basin of water and towel handy nearby in plain view. Yet none of the disciples felt compelled to perform

this demeaning task. And so the first becomes last. Jesus rose, took off his outer cloak, girded himself with a towel, takes the position of the lowliest servant and washes the disciples' feet.

Pastor Brenda Girton-Mitchell recently preached at Wesley Chapel and talked about Jesus being our heavenly podiatrist. Consider your feet for a moment. They are the very foundation of your body. When your feet hurt, you can't seem to think about anything else. Your feet set your direction – it's hard to go somewhere without them! When children begin to walk, they seem to be fascinated with their feet. We put shoes and socks on our feet to protect them from the hard surfaces and harsh surroundings. Those who spend a lot of time walking barefoot develop some pretty impressive calluses – signs of endurance and tenacity. Many of us shy away from anything

like a pedicure because we don't want anyone looking at or handling our feet.

Jesus made a point of taking care of his disciples' feet. He took the time to properly wash and dry the feet of every disciple, perhaps making a very personal connection with each one. In order to wash someone's feet while they sat at a table, you would have to kneel down and make yourself lower than the person seated. You have to humble yourself to the task at hand without regard for your own status. Jesus, the son of God, knelt before his disciples and performed a menial, necessary task demonstrating and embodying the idea of servant leadership.

Once again, I have to talk about Peter. He seems to be such an interesting character so much of the time. Peter becomes downright indignant at the thought of Jesus washing his feet. He cannot see past the menial task to the true meaning of Jesus'

actions. We see Peter often talking before thinking and acting from instinct. Peter cannot stand to see Jesus acting as a servant. Yet Jesus does not rebuke Peter – Jesus says, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” So Peter goes over the top again and says, “not just my feet by my hands and my head as well!” Peter wanted to be thoroughly baptized! Again, Jesus patiently teaches him that he only needs to wash his feet – it is not necessary to wash what is already clean.

Is there a part of us that needs to be made clean? Is there something holding us back from being a part of the body of Christ? Are we struggling with grief or anger, thinking we cannot talk to God because God only wants our praise? Perhaps it is time to bring our cares and concerns to God, while we in turn direct our help to others. Jesus showed us the importance of being in community and bearing one another’s burdens. The

command given for us is to love one another and Christ loves us. We are here to bear one another's burdens. We are here to serve one another and show true love for one another. That is how our community will know that we love God. There is a song in TFWS p. 2223 called, "They'll know we are Christians by our Love." The chorus says, "and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love yes they'll know we are Christians by our love." When we extend the hand of God, we are including members of our community, both near and far. We care for our shut-ins through visits and cards and connections. We help our local families by offering suppers and special events and including them in our family. We are becoming servant leaders in our community.

Jesus became our perfect example of a servant leader. He communed regularly with his disciples. He broke bread with

them, shared experiences with them, taught them how to be true children of God. Tonight we remember. As we partake in the communion service, we literally reenact Jesus' communion with his closest companions, while we recall the sacrifice Jesus made for us by taking the most difficult road to the cross. The words of the liturgy are so familiar to us, "this is the body, this is the blood." As we come forward to receive communion on this Maundy Thursday, let us take a moment to commune with God. Take time to pray. Allow yourself to express your grief or anger or sorrow or awe as we appreciate the meaning of this Holy Week. Take time to reflect on the fact that Jesus suffered and died for our sins that we may have the comfort of a guide to walk with us on our Christian journey, and the promise of eternal life as heirs to the kingdom.

I hope you can join us tomorrow evening as we remember the service of Tenebrae – a service of darkness. We might prefer to skip to the good part, because we know the end of the story. But in order to better appreciate the true meaning of the resurrection celebrated on Easter, we need to travel through the darkness of Good Friday. My hope is that by experiencing the whole story, we will find a truly memorable awareness of God's presence in our lives. Amen.