

Maundy Thursday

April 18, 2019

John 13:1-7 The Message (MSG) Washing His Disciples' Feet

13 1-2 Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come to leave this world to go to the Father. Having loved his dear companions, he continued to love them right to the end. It was suppertime. The Devil by now had Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, firmly in his grip, all set for the betrayal.

3-6 Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. When he got to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Master, you wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later."

John 13:31-35 —A New Command

31-32 When he had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God's glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified—glory all around!

33 "Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I'm telling you: 'Where I go, you are not able to come.'

34-35 "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

Sermon: Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant

When I was a senior at Mississippi College, I entered my first Clinical Pastoral Education course. I was assigned to be an Assistant Chaplain at the Baptist Hospital in Jackson.

We learned about visitation to the sick, the dying, and those in recovery. We also learned about pastoral care for the hospital staff. It was required that we write verbatim reports on our visits so that we could share them with our training group and supervisor. Verbatim reports helped us evaluate our chaplaincy skills by receiving feedback from our peers and supervisor. It was a time to be on the "hot" seat, so to speak, when our turn came.

One visit I made taught me much about what it meant to be a spiritual care giver in the role of an Assistant Student Chaplain. I was assigned a certain floor where I would do regular visitation. Once, I entered the room of an older woman who was recuperating from surgery. I went in and introduced myself to her and told her why I was there. I told her I was visiting as a Student Chaplain and wanted to talk to her and pray with her.

She looked at me and said with a kind face “Honey, could you get me that bed pan.” I did what she asked and left soon to find someone to help her with her needs but after I wondered why she did not know who I was and what I was there to do. Why didn’t she see me as a Chaplain ? Did I look like an aide? I probably looked like a young aide in training at age 21, but I felt I had been misunderstood.

Later in my ministry training I would do four more units of Clinical Pastoral Education (or CPE), but this was my first experience. I never liked going into hospitals, but this first experience taught me not to be afraid. It also taught me about flexibility what it means to be a servant in ministry to others. It taught me about myself.

We learn in our passage tonight from John about how Jesus saw himself. His identity is made clear in his ability to see, respond, and give himself to the moment. His relationship to God is shown in what he does and why he does it.

His unity with God determined his action, his mission and his identity. As I reflect on my own experience many years ago as a student chaplain, I realize how important this connection, this unity, with God was shaping me for my self understanding and my understanding of what it means to belong to God as God’s servant.

Tonight we have a vivid humble picture of Jesus in the hours before he is arrested and crucified. Jesus takes off his outer garment, takes up the servant’s towel, and washes his disciples’ dirty feet.

The act of foot washing in the ancient world symbolized not only humility but also hospitality. In a culture where friends reclined at the table to eat, usually after long and dusty walks, foot washing was an essential step in inviting others to the community feast.

The job was a dirty one usually reserved for lowly servants, but it was extremely important. To wash someone's feet was to recognize them as a welcome guest, to remove any barriers that might keep them from the table.

The Foot Washing scene in the gospel is a turning point for Jesus as he heads to his death and for the disciples as they are commissioned for a new role. Yes, there was resistance but this was Jesus response: As Jesus says to Peter: "unless I wash you, you have no share with me" (John 13:8).

To share the role of discipleship with Jesus, means to take into our identities this role of servant. We need to be on the giving end and the receiving end.

These words of Jesus still speak to us:

"Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

This commissioning for them is our commissioning as well. It shows us that Jesus' followers will share unity with God's purpose if they, too, are on the receiving and giving end.

On Maundy Thursday when we "wash" (feet or hands) and we allow others to wash us, we are saying, we want to be a servant like Jesus. The reenactment of the humble picture of Jesus caring for the needs of others reminds us that this, indeed, is our calling.

The words of Teresa of Avila who lived long ago in Spain and charged those under her care to be Christ's servants. May we take to heart this charge for our preparation to be Easter people.

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours." – Teresa of Avila
AMEN.