

March 29, 2020  
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John 13:3-17     The Last Supper: Risking the Loss of Friends  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 13:3-17                      The Message

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?"

Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later."

Peter persisted, "You're not going to wash my feet—ever!"

Jesus said, "If I don't wash you, you can't be part of what I'm doing."

"Master!" said Peter. "Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!"

Jesus said, "If you've had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you're clean from head to toe. My concern, you understand, is holiness, not hygiene. So now you're clean. But not every one of you." (He knew who was betraying him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you.") After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table.

Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.

We made it! We made it through another week and it has been hard. It has been exhausting and isolating. One of the writers that I follow on twitter is Shannon Dingle. Shannon's husband tragically died last summer at the age of 37. Shannon's husband, Lee, was playing with their six children at the beach when a wave hit him so hard he crashed on the sand, breaking his neck. It was a freak accident. Shannon wrote this week, "Most of us aren't as okay as we pretend to be."

When I am trying to root myself in God and remember who I am and whose I am, I will say favorite Bible verses. One of the verses that will run through my head is John 13:34. This is also the verse that I tell my children when they are fighting. After Jesus washes the disciples feet, he says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Love one another as I have loved you, by serving, forgiving, becoming one with God.

It is the night of the Last Supper when Jesus eats with his disciples for the last time. He gives them the gift of Communion for the first time, and in John's Gospel he takes a risk. John's Gospel is the only one that tells this story of Jesus washing his disciples feet. Through his actions, Jesus names the pain of loss and the disciples just don't want it to be true. Last week I just wanted to know when this will all be over. When will life get back to normal? This is not what I planned for my March, April, and May. When will kids go to school again, when will this sanctuary be filled with people again with children running to get a donut? When will we be able to pass the peace and give hugs and shake hands? Today, I just want everyone I know to be safe. We have had three people in our church family who have had a friend die this week from COVID-19. I don't know when this will be over, I just want everyone to be safe.

We are all having to make more sacrifices than we imagined just a couple of weeks ago. People have lost jobs or are worried about losing them. People are separated from family and wondering when and if they will see them again. The disciples must have felt scared as well. Maybe they were also disappointed with their teacher, Jesus, because he was embracing the road to ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the least of these.

Jesus was acknowledging loss and that makes the disciples uneasy. He was feeling that loss and yet keeping these amazing acts of loving kindness and sacrifice and servanthood as shining beacons. He was telling us that love wins in the end, that Jesus is with us in our pain and loss, and that's God's presence is ever near.

Last week we shared the story of the woman who washes Jesus' feet with oil. Jesus takes a cue from that woman who provided a gift to him and Jesus washes the feet of his friends. Jesus takes the basin of water from the servant's hands, he wraps the servant's towel around his waist, he kneels and he tells Peter to come sit down. Foot washing takes on this different symbolism because of who is doing the washing and whose feet are being washed. Jesus is the master and Peter is the disciple. The idea that the master would wash the disciples' feet turns the world topsy-turvy. Disciples should be washing the master's feet.

When I was ordained, Bishop Rhymes Moncure washed my feet. I remember feeling so awkward as I sat in a chair and watched this man who was my boss's boss, right below Jesus, wash my feet. He washed my feet with such tenderness and love. He dried my feet with a clean towel and then he gave me the towel. Do you know that I still have that towel? For a while I didn't want to use it because it had such a special meaning to me, but one day I decided to use it and it makes me so happy to use that towel.

Washing someone's feet may seem as shocking to us as it was to the disciples, but not for the same reasons. We think feet are gross and dirty, but for the disciples Jesus was the Master Teacher and honored guest who should be first in line to be served, not be the servant. Washing feet was a task performed in the first century by slaves. For Jesus to wash the disciples feet it was a sign of humility, an act of service.

From the very beginning Jesus had told the disciples that he was going to free those held captive, especially the least among society. When Jesus stood up in the temple and read from the scroll at the very beginning of his ministry he shared what he was going to be about. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus rolls up the scroll and sits down. Then he says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." When Jesus washes the feet of his friends he is living out his calling by taking the place of a slave. In just a few weeks we will remember Jesus dying as a common criminal.

Jesus washes the disciples' feet as a way of saying that those who claim to be his followers should do what Jesus does, in service to others. Jesus came not to be served but to serve, and we should do the same thing. I love that Peter doesn't get what Jesus is trying to do. But, it is so easy for us to be like Peter. We don't like accepting service from others. We get nervous when friends, let alone strangers, go out of their way to be helpful, especially if they act in a way that is not convenient, or pleasant, for them personally. Service is up close and personal. Service is something others can see and appreciate. Service is showing humility. Jesus teaches us that we need to receive, with gratitude, gifts that are appropriate to the occasion and marked by generosity.

As we try to make peace with our new reality, I want to encourage you to think about your neighbors and ask you to write seven notes. Why seven? Because seven is a good holy number. Write on the note, Hi, I'm your neighbor. My name is \_\_\_\_ (your name) and I live at \_\_\_\_ (your address). How are you doing? Share with them your phone number and invite them to reach out to you. You could offer to get them something at the store if it is safe for you to do

so. Or you could ask them to call if they want to talk. You might already have reached out to your neighbors, and if so, great! Are there more neighbors that you could reach out to?

Today it is so important for us to notice the helpers. There are so many people who are sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. We need reminders of that hope. What are some big and small ways that you can give back to others? Helping others gives us a sense of agency when things seem out of control. This is temporary, even if it feels like it will never end. This too shall pass and we will return feeling free, safe, busy and connected in the days ahead. I want to encourage us to think about what is the lesson for us in all of this? What can each of us learn in big and small ways from this crisis? What needs to change in ourselves, our homes, our communities, our nation, and our world? Write down your ideas in the comments if you are on facebook or email me your ideas. We want to learn from this. Our collective wisdom may lead us to new understandings.

This is our first time to be in a global pandemic. We can be our worst selves when we're afraid or we can be our very best, bravest selves. When we are afraid and uncertain, our default is self-protection. We don't have to be scary when we're scared. Every day we can choose awkward, brave, and kind. Let's choose each other.<sup>1</sup> Jesus chose to wash the feet of his disciples. Bishop Moncure chose to wash my feet. What small act can we choose to do to help others? Amen.

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph taken from Brene Brown's blog post: <https://brenebrown.com/blog/2020/03/21/collective-vulnerability/>