

Maundy Thursday 2024

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself – why is the sermon so early in the service? We haven't even heard the Gospel yet and you are preaching to us?

Well – that is by design. This is in remembrance of the whole world being flipped upside down, the top becoming bottom and bottom becoming top. It begins here with the Maundy Thursday liturgy being rearranged, which then continues on through Good Friday and Easter Vigil. These three services are actually considered one service.

So, tonight, by being here you are entering the Triduum – the Holy Three Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday – and these holy three days begin with a very important commandment. Maundy means commandment. That commandment is that we love one another, that we love one another as God loves us, which was demonstrated at the Last Supper through the washing of the disciples' feet.

Although the disciples did not originally understand what was happening, Jesus washing the disciples' feet is the forgiveness of sin being acted out on them and it was an act that the disciples would never forget.

Too often we think that forgiveness is something that we do in our head or heart, but Jesus shows us that forgiveness is much more than that. We don't just say "you are forgiven," we do forgiveness through our actions. Forgiveness is known in how we physically treat one another, how we care for one another.

The entirety of the Last Supper was about forgiveness, from the washing of feet to the meal that was shared. So tonight, the first thing we experience is the laying on of hands with individual forgiveness of sin. We do that so each of us is assured that without a doubt we truly are forgiven. There is no chance forgiveness ricocheted off of us or passed us by and went to someone else.

These holy three days are all about forgiveness. The beginning, middle, and end are all about the forgiveness of sin, sin that separates us from God and from one another.

Tonight, we remember that before he was even killed on the cross, he has already forgiven us and commanded us to love one another as he loves us through acts of forgiveness in the world.

Before he is killed, Jesus forgives us. He forgives us so that we will not despair as he is killed, so that the relationship between God and all people is healed, and so that the relationships we have with each other can be healed as well.

Before he is killed, Jesus forgives us and gives us the commandment to love one another as he loves us, that we love one another by doing acts of forgiveness.

In Jesus day, people walked around in sandals, and their feet got really dirty. They were not walking on sidewalks and asphalt like we do, but on dirt roads. You can imagine wearing sandals in the dirt, right? Perhaps you have even done it before. Maybe on a hike.

As a kid, we walked around in sandals at my grandmother's house and we would get absolutely filthy. We would have to hose down in the mud room before coming in the house.

I guess nothing has really changed, right? How many of you take off your shoes before entering your house? I do. Same idea.

In Jesus' day, the first act of hospitality was to have a basin of water available for people to wash off their own feet before entering the home. It's refreshing to have clean feet and it also helps keep the house clean. And if the host was wealthy enough, they might even have a slave washing people's feet with sweet smelling water and a nice soft towel.

Notice, it wasn't the host who washed the feet, but the slave. And that is why it was so offensive to the disciples that Jesus, their teacher and Lord, washed their feet. The host had taken the position of the slave. The world was being flipped upside down!

And not only that. The teacher was kneeling at the feet of his students. Students kneel at the teacher's feet, not the other way around.

Jesus was flipping the whole world upside down. Top was bottom and bottom was top. Nothing was making any sense, just as Peter aptly protested – you cannot wash my feet! It's just not what is done!

What Peter is actually saying is – I will not allow you to be shamed for me! And Jesus responds, unless you let me do this you have no idea what my ministry is all about. Jesus in his actions is saying - I take on shame for you so that you can take shame on for others as well. That way, all shame will be erased off the face of the earth and forgiveness will be known in the world.

This is earth shattering, and only the beginning of the world being flipped on its head. Soon the Word of God who creates all life will be put to death in the most shameful way possible at the time, but that's tomorrow's story.

Today, we remember Jesus our teacher and our Lord setting before us an example of how we should treat one another, how we should love one another, with acts of forgiveness that remove shame.

We are never to assume the highest position, because that causes shame, but we are to take our place at the bottom and be servants to one another, humbling walking with each other, and thereby also walking humbly with God where there is no shame.

Being humble servants for one another is where God calls us to be. It is the place from which good news comes. Our Lord and Teacher became a slave for us and asks us to follow in his footsteps with clean feet on holy ground. He makes our footsteps clean in order to make all ground holy. God makes us clean, so that through us he can make others clean as well by removing all the shame that haunts us.

Washing feet is an activity that is shared, one person to another. It started with a small community at the Last Supper and continues to form a larger community through the restoration of relationships today.

As disciples, we are sent to remove the grime of separation from one another, to forgive one another our humanness, our sinfulness, in acts of forgiveness so that relationships are restored through the removal of shame.

By saying, "I have dirty feet," and allowing others to wash them, and hearing someone else say "I have dirty feet" and washing theirs – we are loving one another as Christ has loved us. When we all admit we have dirty feet and help each other, there is no pretense of one being greater than another and sin is washed away.

In Isaiah 52:7, the prophet says - How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Jesus gives us beautiful feet.

When we share God's good news of unconditional and infinite love for all people, we give others beautiful feet and invite them to share the good news with us through acts of forgiveness.

Your feet have been made beautiful by Jesus Christ our teacher and Lord who sends us out to share the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation through humble acts of love. Through him, all shame has been washed away and thereby the old idea of a hierarchy of righteousness has been washed away as well, flipping the whole world upside down and giving all people an even playing ground where God acts first and we follow by loving others as we ourselves are loved.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

(Foot washing – shoes prepare us to do good works – Lent in Plain Sight, Jill J Duffield, 2020)