

Maundy Thursday
April 14, 2022

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

Who is the greatest? That's a question that seems to come up a lot with Jesus' disciples.

In Luke's telling of the Passion, there is an argument at the Last Supper as to who is the greatest disciple, and Jesus reminds them that the greatest is the servant.

Paul also gets caught up in the debate as we see in some of his letters where he lists all of his credentials only then to back track and proclaim that Jesus alone is the greatest.

In the Gospel of John, there is no discussion about who is the greatest among the disciples. In John, that discussion never happens. But, we do get this incident at the Last Supper where Jesus washes the disciples' feet.

Instead of an argument about being the greatest, in the Gospel of John, Jesus shows the disciples what makes a disciple great by literally washing their feet, by taking the position of a slave.

We know this was offensive, because Peter protests, but Jesus insists. We cannot truly know what it is to be a disciple until we put our ego aside. The idea of being the greatest is an obstacle to being a disciple.

If we are going to follow Jesus, we have to be humble and realize that there is nothing "below us." Not even caring for the feet of other Good News messengers.

In John, Jesus acts out humility for us to follow. Love one another, as Christ loves us, and God's love will be known in the world. You'll notice that Jesus never says – be hammered to a cross. Jesus says follow me in acts of love. The cross is the ultimate act of love, but that is not our call. Carry our cross, yes. Crucified, no.

No one will go to the cross but Jesus even through his followers say they will go with him. Only Jesus goes to the cross so that none of us can say we are the greatest. God alone is great.

During Lent we have been remembering the First Commandment. God is God and we are not.

The Gospel of John is the most Trinitarian of the four Gospels. John opens with this description of Jesus - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

As Jesus washes his disciples' feet, we see that walking humbly with God is the flip side of God walking humbly with us.

For our sake, God lowers God's self to the lowest point in death in order to lift us up into God's eternal life. Washing feet is not the lowest God is willing to go for us. Death is. But Jesus doesn't call us into following him there. No. Jesus only calls us to love one another here and now. To set our egos aside and look out for the wellbeing of one another. To be humble in our walk with God and with one another.

We serve God by serving one another in acts of love.

As 1 John 4:20 says - those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

So we love one another and walk humbly with one another – loving God by following God's call for us to love one another, and it has absolutely nothing to do with our greatness, only God's greatness. There is no grading system that gets you into the Kingdom of God.

It's only through God's unconditional love that we are brought into the Kingdom of God. And by humbly loving others, we live the Kingdom of God here and now. And so Jesus gives us a new commandment – to love one another. That makes this celebration of the Last Supper also Commandment Thursday, Maundy Thursday.

This is the commandment Jesus gives us – love one another.

In Jesus' day, it was customary for hosts to have water for people to wash off their feet when they entered the home, not everyone had a servant to do the job, and those who did have servants often didn't even acknowledge them or their service at all.

That's why it was so offensive to Peter that Jesus would wash their feet. Jesus was making himself the least and lowly and flipping everything they understood to be the norm on its head. Jesus, after all is the host, and here he is doing the work of a slave.

Now, if you have ever been out on a hot day and then put your feet into a cool bucket of water or into a swimming pool, you know how refreshing that is. That's what foot washing was like in Jesus' day. The washing of feet was for refreshment. With all of the dust washed off and the coolness of the water on their feet, people were refreshed, and that's what our goal is for tonight – to refresh others as Christ refreshes us. To be refreshing.

So, in lieu of a literal foot washing, this evening we will figuratively wash feet by writing thank you notes. Tonight we will practice living the Kingdom of God by refreshing others, by humbly loving those who are often invisible – the ones we take for granted – those who serve us in a myriad of different ways – as we remember Jesus washing the disciples feet.

So take a moment and think about those people you take for granted. Think about those who have a thankless job. It could be - the janitor at the grocery store. The people who pick up our trash. The fire fighters and police officers who dedicate themselves to our protection. Those who do menial tasks that make our lives better. Those who have jobs of which we think – ick, I would never do that.

Jesus humbled himself, even to the point of death, for us. When we walk humbly with one another and love the other, see one another and appreciate one another, we walk in the way of the cross, and that's what's truly great about being a disciple – participating in God's love.

So, let us give thanks and acknowledge those whom we take for granted, knowing that there are those who take us for granted as well. But, it's not about being the greatest. It's just about seeing and loving one another, because there is no ladder to climb to heaven. We get to live it right here and now.

Thanks be to God. Amen.