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Date: April 9, 2020
Sermon: Maundy Thursday
Scripture: Mark 14:17-25
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

Mark 14:17-25

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?' He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.'

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

Maundy Thursday is primarily about the Lord's Supper. The Last Supper, Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Mass. That's really the number-one idea of tonight.

Jesus and his friends were gathered together for a very important meal. Remember, they were all Jewish, and God had told the Jewish people that every year they should have this special dinner called "Passover." And they used the dinner to remember how awful their lives had been when Jews were slaves in Egypt *and* to remember how God had freed them from slavery, led them out of Egypt, and kept his promises to them.

So the food they eat and the words they say remind them of the hard times and the good times of the past and the present. That's what Jesus and his friends were doing that night, Maundy Thursday, remembering how tough life can be *and* how miraculous life can be.

Now, it turned out that Passover meal was the last time that the really human Jesus and his friends had supper together, so it became known as "the Last Supper." That's what we mostly remember. Jesus used that Passover supper as a "teaching moment." He took the Passover bread, like a matzoh cracker or pita bread, and he broke it apart, telling his friends that his body would soon be broken apart—for them. And he took that blood-red Passover wine and poured it for his friends, telling them his lifeblood would soon be poured out—for them.

That's the part we most often remember; in fact, Jesus told us to remember, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." That's why it's called "Holy Communion." It's our chance to commune, to be together with Jesus by remembering him.

But two other big things happened during Jesus's Last Supper that mostly get forgotten, and that's too bad. First, Jesus prayed a really long prayer. Some call it "The Great Prayer," and in that prayer Jesus prayed for unity. For us. For Christians. For Church people. For his followers. To be one. To act as though we really care about others, respect one another, need one another.

We haven't done that very well. Truth is, we've done other things, tougher things Jesus said to do, much better. Forgiveness, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, feeding the hungry, "going into all the world, teaching and baptizing." A lot of that has gotten done, is still being done, and we've done it well.

But unity, true unity, has been elusive. True unity is not mere tolerance. It's respect, pride, affection. We had it for a couple of weeks coming out of 9/11. We had it for a couple of years coming out of Pearl Harbor. Right now we have it across America, people helping one another, looking out for one another, states working together, people making sacrifices to help out. Our "better Angels," our "good side," all working overtime. We like that. Jesus prayed hard for that—to last, to be our regular way of being. Maybe that's why it's called, "The Great Prayer."

The other thing Jesus did was to wash the Disciples' feet. We don't really get that, because nobody does that anymore. But in olden times, 2,000 years ago, in the dusty ancient Middle East, when everybody wore sandals, and streets were made of dirt, when you went to somebody's house, if they really wanted to treat you nicely, they would bring out a basin of water, a fresh towel, and wash your feet. Maybe a servant did it, or one of their kids, or you did it yourself. But it got done, and it felt good.

Jesus astounded everyone at the Last Supper by doing it himself, washing everybody's feet! Jesus, the Rabbi, the master, the teacher, the Savior, the one they were already calling "the Christ," got down on his hands and knees, washed

everybody's dirty, dusty, tired feet, wiped them clean. And then said to them, *and* to us, "I've set you an example. You, us, we, should do the same."

I've been part of foot washing a bunch of times, but twice stand out. One Maundy Thursday at the height of the Vietnam War, one of our Church boys was headed to war, and so I brought him up to the altar in his uniform, took off his boots, and washed his feet. Soldiers serve us, right? They sacrifice for us. They represent us.

But in that one moment, our Church was saying, "Let us serve you." And "We're promising we won't forget you." The second instance, someone washed my feet. I was serving a little Church in upstate New York. We didn't have much money, but we had property. There was a Christian drug rehabilitation home that was run out of another town. Nobody wanted a drug rehab place near them. So we let them live in one of our properties for a year or so, rent-free. So, one Maundy Thursday, they invited me and our Head Deacon to come to the house. They served us dinner, and then, well, they washed our feet. It was their expression of humble thanks, serving us for our serving them.

There you have it. Three powerful parts of the Lord's Supper, powerful symbols, powerful statements. Jesus, praying for our unity, in a world of disunity, division, rancor, competition, prejudice, arrogance, even back then. Jesus, praying for our unity. And Jesus, humbly, on his knees, washing their feet, our feet, telling us to do the same. To be humble. To serve. And Jesus, breaking bread, pouring wine, a graphic reminder of his own brokenness, his own spilling. Because sometimes we need a graphic reminder of who really cares.

September 11th will forever have the image of New York firemen rushing into the Twin Towers because, well, that's what firemen do. The Coronavirus of 2020 will forever have the image of medical staff working endless hours, countless shifts, at great risk, because, well, that's what medical people do.

And Maundy Thursday, the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, will forever have the image of Jesus baring his soul, prepared to give his life because, well, that's what a Savior does.