

John 13:1-17, 34-35 (CEB) ¹ Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully. ² Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. ⁶ When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later." ⁸ "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean." ¹² After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? ¹³ You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. ¹⁴ If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. ¹⁶ I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them... ³⁴ "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. ³⁵ This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

John 13:1-17, 34-25

Maundy Thursday 04/02/2026

Swan Valley Four Points Church

"Into the Night"

Rev. Amy Terhune

A few weeks into a new school year, Susan Moser, a mother from Pennsylvania, asked her young son what he thought of first grade. With enthusiasm, he replied, "Oh, I love school. It's great!" Then, after a brief hesitation, he added. "Well, except for one thing... I don't really like it when Mrs. Decker tries to teach us stuff." [from Susan P. Moser, Pennsylvania "Small talk," *Today's Christian Woman*, Sept./Oct. 1996, p. 41. As used in "The Servant-King" by Angela Akers, www.Sermons.com.]

I sometimes wonder if the disciples secretly thought that way about Jesus. We like the healings and the crowds and all that, but we don't really like it when Jesus tries to teach us stuff. Throughout Lent this year, I've been focusing on the places and the ways that Jesus leads us through life – into the wilderness, the dark, the heat, he goes before us. He also leads us into light and openness and facing challenges. He won't ask us to go where he hasn't already been. Tonight, he heads out into the night, into all the evil that will befall him there, into death itself, into new life. Robert Frost comes to mind: "I have been one acquainted with the night. I have walked out in rain—and back in rain. I have outwalked the furthest city light." Loneliness. Isolation. But before Jesus goes out into that night; leads us out into that night, he gathers his beloved friends together and he teaches. This is it. The final

exam is coming, and nothing more can be crammed in after tonight. So he leaves them with a lesson – a sentinel against the night – a tutorial about what it looks like to live selfless love out in practical ways.

We recall how the disciples had gathered to eat the Passover Seder. Luke tells us that they were arguing about who among them was the greatest. John doesn't report that, but it is hardly out of character. What John does report is that in silence, Jesus took off his robe, tied a towel around himself and proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples—feet coated not only with dust and dirt, but with all sorts of other things found on an ancient street. Things like animal dung, garbage, and sewage. And these feet belonged to men who not only argue amongst themselves, but who would betray, deny, and desert him. Max Lucado points out the absurdity of it all when he writes, “Hands that shaped stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before His disciples.... I looked for a Bible translation that reads, “Jesus washed all the disciples’ feet except the feet of Judas,” but I couldn’t find one.” [from <https://leanintothelord.com/with-towel-and-basin-by-max-lucado/>] Even the great traitor experiences the Lord of the Universe bowing before him to wash his feet. Can we really comprehend how shocking this was? How appalled his disciples must have been? How embarrassed even? What are you doing, Jesus? Haven't you got any pride? Peter seems to say it best: Lord, you will *never* wash my feet!

But he must. He must because he knows that in coming days, his disciples will spend some time with heads hanging, looking down at their feet in shame over their failures, and when that happens, he wants them to realize and understand that he already loved them, forgave them, cleaned them up. When he returns to the table, he says to them, “Do you know what I’ve done for you? ¹³ You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you speak correctly, because I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet...” Did you hear that? You also must wash each other’s feet. That sounds awfully definitive to me—like we’re supposed to be doing this. We’re supposed to be washing each other’s feet. There are some within the church who argue that foot washing ought to be sacrament, on par with Baptism and Communion, since Jesus himself tells us to wash one another’s feet. But I’m not sure it is the act itself as much as the posture that Jesus calls us to emulate. Kneeling. Serving. Humility. Purposefully choosing work, not for honor it might bring, but because we want to live our love. That’s what Jesus calls us to be about. And it’s counter-intuitive and counter-cultural.

He commands them to love—and not just to love, but to love as he loves. Be my disciples, he says. They’ll know you by your love; by your service. Maundatum—it means mandate; commandment. It’s where this night gets its name: Maundy Thursday. Maundatum. Commandment Thursday. You Shall Love Thursday. I like that. Everyday should be ‘You Shall Love’ Day.

“But on hearing such a commandment, the skeptic may jump into the fray to ask: “Can love be commanded? Doesn’t love well up from within?” The answer is no – at least, not the kind of love of which Jesus is speaking. The love which Jesus talks about has nothing to do with how we feel toward someone, but rather, how we conduct ourselves; the posture we take towards others. Emotions are wonderful things—they make us human. But emotions are not to be trusted as a moral compass. Love does not well up in us for our enemies, for those who differ, for those whose opinions or lifestyles we cannot respect... You cannot whip up an emotion if it is not there, but you can take a posture of love toward another, which means that whether or not I feel anything for this person, or feel negative things for this person, I will, as a matter of principle, act with love.

“In that Upper Room so long ago, Jesus did not say to His disciples, “I have given you an example that you have good feelings toward one another.” No! ...Jesus did not stretch wide his arms on Calvary and say, “I feel for you all.” Instead, he died on a cross because He loved us all...

“Ideas,” George Eliot once wrote, “are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them. But sometimes they are made flesh. They breathe upon us with warm breath. They are clothed

in a living human soul. Then their presence is a power.” The ideas of Jesus have originality and power not because no one else ever spoke them before or since; but because He spoke them, and because in His own person He incarnated everything that he taught. [previous 3 ¶s adapted from “One Commandment, Slightly Used” by Donald B. Strobe, www.Sermons.com.] Jesus is love in the flesh. And he gives us tangible symbols of that flesh and blood in the bread and the cup, that we may understand first how deeply we’re loved. In the United Methodist Church, we don’t block access to the bread and the cup. Because God doesn’t inform me about what He may be doing in you. So all are welcome. All may receive. Because all are loved. And because there is something about taking in bread and juice that enables us take in one another and the grace of God, knitting us together. We remember and we are connected.

“A community in Florida had been hit hard by a hurricane power was out, houses were flooded, roads were closed. At the Red Cross center at the local middle school, a distraught mother asked tearfully for six flashlight batteries. “My kids are afraid of the dark” she explained.

“Sorry,” came the answer. “Only two batteries to a family. However, if you have relatives living with you, you can have two more for each one.”

The woman just stood there paralyzed, teary-eyed and helpless, when college freshman Ryan Arbel piped up. “I’m a relative!”

“So am I,” announced an elderly Chinese woman nearby.

“The Red Cross worker handed the mother six batteries with a smile. [from Dr. Clayton A. Cobb, <http://www.spbts.org/sermons/102324.htm>; as used in “Where Love Comes From” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com. Adapted here.] Ryan Arbel wasn’t stretching the truth at all. We are relatives.

Love is a choice. It is also what identifies us as Christians. Jesus told his followers, “This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you love for one another.” Footwashing may never catch on as a sacrament in the church, if for no other reason than the simple fact that the clergy have not yet figured out the logistics of maintaining modesty while attempting to wash the feet of a woman wearing pantyhose. But it is catching on in homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Because people who walk the street need their feet cared for after spending hours walking cement in rain and dirt in shoes with holes in the soles. But those who work with those on the street find that even more powerful than clean socks and new shoes is the reality that for many on the street, this is the only time in their week when another human being actually, physically touches them. Usually they go through their days without any human contact, except to be occasionally shouldered out of the way. Think about that. People need to be touched. They need physical touch, but they also need spiritual touch. Everyone needs to experience being loved. We who are Christians have experienced that love from God, and quite frankly, we should hunger to pass that love on with all that’s in us.

“Nora Lacie Abell tries her best to pass love on to her young neighbor, 12-year-old Quentin. Sometimes it’s hard to know how best to do that. Quentin is autistic, and because of his condition he lives in his own world and prefers to have very little emotional connection with anyone. One day, Nora’s husband took Quentin fishing. That night, Quentin called the Abell’s home around midnight and expressed appreciation the only way he knew how—by burping out the words, “I love you.” It may not have been the most conventional way to communicate his feelings, but Nora and her husband understood. Ever since that night, Quentin will occasionally call them and “burp” something into the phone. Quentin’s mother used to get embarrassed by it, but she understands now that Nora cherishes those ‘burpy’ calls. It is Quentin’s own unique but expressive way of relating to another, and as far as Nora is concerned, that effort on his part is sacred. [By Nora Lacie Abell in *Stories of God’s Abundance for a More Joyful Life*, compiled by Kathy Collard Miller (Lancaster, PA: Starburst Publishers, 1999), pp.4-5; adapted from “What Love Looks Like” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

Love is a choice. It is what identifies us as Christians. And it is humbling. Jesus showed his love by serving—by doing what everyone else thought was too low for their status. Love does what needs to be done. Love gives what needs to be given. Love goes where it needs to go—to out of the way places and unknown people. Love goes out into the night, in the rain, past the furthest city light. Love goes all the way to death on a cross and beyond. Love is humble, but it glorifies God. Love is humble, but it changes the world. And lest you think that following Jesus in the way of love won't matter, an unknown poet put it this way:

"Father, where shall I work today?" And my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed me out a tiny spot, and said, "Tend that for me."
I answered quickly, "Oh no! not that, why no one would ever see
No matter how well my work was done. Not that little place for me!"
And the word He spoke, it was not stern, He answered me tenderly,
"Ah, my child, search that heart of yours. Are you working for them or me?
Remember that Nazareth was a little place, and so was Galilee."
[by Meade McGuire, from the internet]

Amen.