

Year A, April 13, 2017
Maundy Thursday
Christ Church, Mexia

The Rev. Ben Helmer once said: "There is something special about this sacred day that sets it apart – something deeply transforming. We are not merely remembering the night before Jesus died, we are actually living it through the liturgy." And I think that is a very good observation. We have begun the usual way for our worship, but when I finish speaking, we will have the opportunity to participate in the washing of feet, like Jesus did. Then we will have the meal together and afterward we will be able to serve again in clearing the church.

Servant leadership – this is the example that Jesus emphasizes yet again. Napoleon Bonaparte, of all people, is credited with the following quote: "Alexander, Caesar, and Hannibal conquered the world but they had no friends... Jesus founded his empire upon love, and at this hour millions would die for him... He has won the hearts of men, a task no conqueror can do." Apparently, even Napoleon, understood the power of love, even if he didn't utilize it.

And as Jesus demonstrates, love requires humility. What can be more humble than washing a person's feet, even today when we don't wear "sandals" on dusty roads or surfaces constantly and when we bathe more often? It is an intimate act, and certainly one that conveys to the other, I don't consider myself better than you. John's account, focuses on the foot washing, by the way, rather than the meal as the synoptic gospels do, and the author begins the story emphasizing: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." The latter part of that sentence could also and probably should be translated "to the utmost." And if you think about it, this, washing their feet, is the final act of Jesus' ministry – the final act.

After he finishes, Jesus asks the disciples – "Do you know what I have done to you?" And then following a few sentences later, he says "For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Well, I don't think he means we have to go around washing everyone's feet all of the time, though it wouldn't be a bad thing. But he does expect us to love and serve others in many various ways.

Recall when Peter resists having Jesus wash his feet. Jesus says: "Unless I wash you, you have no share of me." Peter has to receive Jesus' love and service in order to be his disciple. So do we. We cannot give or share what we do not have. And Jesus washes Judas'

feet, the man he knows is going to betray him, as well as the others. Jesus' love is for everyone! So, it is ours for the taking, and we are to continue to share it with everyone.

Thus, in closing, let me return to the words of Ben Helmer: "Maundy Thursday gives us liberation, freedom and grace to transform not only ourselves, but to become a new community, not one centered merely on liturgy that remembers, but one centered on liturgy that leads us to act."

Or think of it in this way: "Bruce Thielemann, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, tells of a conversation he had with a member of his congregation who said, 'You preachers talk a lot about do unto others, but when you get right down to it, it comes down to basin theology.' Thielemann asked him what in the world was 'basin theology.' The layman said, "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before His death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology; Which one will you use?" That is definitely the question we should ponder over the next three days.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.