

3.28.2024 Maundy Thursday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“Love one another”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

On Maundy Thursday we remember two things Jesus gave to his disciples at his last supper. As he lifted the bread and cup, Jesus gave his church a new covenant of forgiveness, making the Eucharist a perpetual ordinance meant to build up his body, the church. In addition, after the meal Jesus gave his disciples an example of humble service by washing his disciples’ feet, giving them a new commandment, *“That you love one another. Just as I have love you, you also should love one another.”*

Together, the Lord’s Supper and the new commandment to love one another are the core of Christian worship and service to others. Indeed, the very word “liturgy” or *litourgia*, which we translate as “service” means not just an order of worship, but God’s service to us and our service to one another and the world.

In Holy Communion, Jesus is the host giving us, in bread and wine, his body and blood with forgiveness that frees us to serve one another. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper continually gathers the church as a community fed and forgiven by grace so we might sacramentally live in loving service to the world.

After supper, in the washing of his disciples’ feet, Jesus set an example that Christians are to serve others through humble service. Asking us to imitate him, Jesus says, *“Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.”* This word “servants,” comes from *doulos* in Greek meaning a slave or servant who does the menial tasks that the wealthy and powerful think it beneath them to do for others.

In antiquity when everyone wore sandals traveling over unpaved roads, washing feet was a common sign of hospitality. When guests arrived at someone’s home, they were greeted, and their feet washed by a slave or a servant. To the great surprise of Peter and the disciples, Jesus the one sent from the Father showed them that *“servants are not greater than their master.”*

His new commandment to “love one another” reveals that not only in church, but in all dimensions of our lives, Christian service is in imitation to the example of Jesus so that *“everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

For many today, washing the feet of a guest isn’t something we expect when we are

welcomed into someone's home. But imagine if you were homeless and truly had no home or place to bathe. I was thinking about this today as I gave towels to a homeless guest at the Soup Kitchen so he could take a shower, as afterwards as I washed, dried, and folded the towels that he has used.

Jesus told his disciples "*servants are not greater than their master; nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them*" because his disciples were about to be sent into the world to serve in his name. They would be persecuted and even killed for their service to Jesus Christ. Yet the church spread throughout the ancient world because of their witness of love. We call many of these early Christians "martyrs" because the Greek word *marturos* literally means to be "a witness." Love is our witness and service to the world.

We still see it all around us. People have not changed very much since Jesus' day. The rich and powerful often expect to be served rather than using their power and wealth in humble service to others. Though many pay lip service to Jesus' word, everything about Jesus witnesses to the humility of God's Son who came to serve rather than to be served. Jesus did the work of a servant that today we might expect immigrants, foreigners, and the poor to do rather than doing these humble tasks ourselves. These things matter not only in worship, but in how we live them out in daily life.

Before someone is given the keys to the corner office, the test for anyone desiring to become a public servant should be to ask if they are willing to wash the towels, wash the floor, or clean the restrooms of the building in which they work or the churches where they worship.

When I served as a missionary in Japan, I remember a man at my church who was a high-level public servant in the Japanese government, serving as a member of the prime minister's cabinet. This man's corner office was high up in one of the government buildings in the Kasumigaseki district of Tokyo, with a view upon the imperial palace grounds. By any standard in this world, this was a vast office suggesting great power and authority. Yet this soft-spoken and powerful man swept the street in front of the church, helped clean the church restrooms, and washed dishes. He was a public servant who in answering to the prime minister, also understood that humble service in public flows from answering the call to Jesus Christ.

Tonight, on Maundy Thursday, we remember that in the breaking of the bread, Jesus instituted a new covenant of forgiveness. In the words of institution Jesus says, "*given for you,*" meaning he gives you grace that forgives and frees you for service in his name. The words, "*Do*

*this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me,”* mean that we should partake of the Eucharist as often as possible relying upon his grace. Fed and forgiven by Christ we seek to humbly serve with him in this world.

This is what we do at St. Mark's: Jesus sets a table for us, feeds, and forgives us so that imitating him, we might set tables for one another in fellowship and for our neighbors; so that we might offer a safe place to stay at Room in the Inn; so that we might wash and dry towels for someone without a home. The service of Holy Communion prepares us for sacramental service to our neighbor.

Look to his cross of service for this world. Jesus gave his life for you, so you might give your life; use your power; and offer all you have in loving service to him and your neighbor.

You are his hands and voices serving him in this world.

Love one another as he has loved you. Amen.