



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094
(920)261-2570
A Stephen Ministry Congregation
www.goodshepherdwi.org

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 18, 2019

“Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet”

(John 13:3-5)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him” (Jn. 13:3-5).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Growing up in Delavan, there was really only one place to buy shoes: Don's Shoes. It was a quiet little store in downtown Delavan. The owner was Don. The customer service rep was Don. The cashier and the HR department and purchasing agent and chief custodian: Don.

He was a trim man who always wore dress slacks and a long-sleeve white shirt with a tie. With one knee on the floor he would carefully measure the length and width of my feet. Then he would pull out the shoes he had in that size. He laced them up so efficiently—not one wasted movement. He tied them with the same efficiency, using a different sort of knot than I was taught to use. (I wasn't sure that was right, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt.) He'd pinch my shoe to find my big toe, and then have me walk back and forth under his trained eye all the while asking me questions about pinching and sliding and comfort.

He was so concerned about my feet! It left an impression on me. This respected business man, in dress shirt and tie, kneeling at my feet, caring about my feet! Though just a small boy he somehow made me feel important, like a valuable member of the community.

One time Jesus laid aside his outer garments, and wrapped a large towel around his waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel. The disciples could hardly believe it. That he should do this for them? In Jewish households, that was the job of a slave if you had one, never the task of a rabbi. It certainly wasn't the task of the Lord of all.

The roads of Palestine were not surfaced. In dry weather there was a blanket of dust on the roads, and in wet weather that dust turned immediately into mud. The shoes

worn by most people were sandals, simple soles held on to the foot by a few straps. They gave little protection against the dust or the mud. For this reason there were always great water pots at the door of houses for the washing of your feet before entering.

Jesus and his disciples had no servants. The duties otherwise given to a servant in wealthier circles must have been shared among each other. But apparently no one offered to do so on this occasion. There in the upper room, they were all waiting for someone else to volunteer. Additionally, Luke tells us that on this same evening, “a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered the greatest” (Lk. 22:24). Can you imagine? They’re arguing about position and status, and may have gotten one another into such a state of competitive pride that not one of them would wash the feet of their friends. Jesus did what none of his disciples was prepared to do. One after another, he washed his disciples’ feet, kneeling in front of them. My guess is no one was talking; I think the room had grown silent.

It did give Peter a chance to think of something to say he thought would be impressive, a bit of one-upmanship over the other disciples. Lord, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me”. Unless Peter consents to the Lord’s washing, he’ll not share in Jesus’ eternal inheritance. Of course, Jesus is talking about being cleansed of our sin. The external washing of feet was a picture of the internal cleansing that comes with the Lord’s forgiveness, which each of us needs.

Well that certainly got Peter’s attention. So once again Peter pours it on: “Then not just my feet, but my hands and my head!” If foot washing is good, then further washing must be better. Jesus responds by saying “The one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet.” The disciples had already received the Lord’s forgiveness. They had already been spiritually cleansed. But just as one who walks about in ancient Palestine regularly needs a foot washing, so Christians must lead a life of daily repentance.

It's what we do. It's who we are. Repentance isn't just for a season, nor is it a transaction with God for temporary relief of guilt. Repentance is a way of life, a daily turning away from anything that is not God pleasing, and a turning back toward God.

But let's talk a little bit more about this washing. John has a habit of saying things in such a way that there are often multiple layers of meaning. I wonder: could this washing also point to the cleansing waters of baptism? As I said earlier, the foot washing always happened at the door of the house. Similarly, the washing of Holy Baptism marks our entry into the Church, into the household of faith. In fact, many churches have their baptismal fonts in the narthex, just inside the doors, as a reminder that it is by baptism we enter the church. The one who is too proud for baptism has no part in the church and risks losing everything.

In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus was also establishing a pattern of humility for Christians to follow. It's an example of sacrificial service, of swallowing your pride and doing what needs to be done, however dirty or inconvenient, menial or humiliating. Sacrificial service is doing the work no one else wants to do. If washing feet was not too lowly a task for Jesus, then neither can we turn away from such humble acts of service.

Years ago we had a clean-up day here at church. A school dad came. He wasn't a member, but he had his basket of cleaning supplies. He parked himself all morning in the men's bathroom. He gave every square inch of it a good cleaning.

Where do you draw the line in service of others? Think about lowering the bar even further. If washing the feet of his disciples was not too lowly a task for God incarnate, then there's not much out there that is too lowly for us.

This ought to make us think. So often in churches trouble arises when someone feels slighted. Pastors can be offended that they did not receive the respect they believe their office entitles them. Church leaders can be offended

they were not thanked or recognized. Also at work, at home, in the store, on the road, when unintentionally slighted, people can explode in anger or sulk and brood for days. We are always thinking about our own prestige and status, our rights. We stand proud and firm in our dignity when we should be kneeling (if only in attitude) at the feet of our brothers and sisters to serve them. You can check your attitude by keeping this image of Jesus in mind, kneeling one at a time before each of his disciples' feet in order to wash them. You can get over the feeling of being forgotten by remembering Jesus and his service to us.

Finally, Jesus would show this same humble, selfless service the next day on the cross.

If I knew I was about to be arrested, then tried and sentenced to be executed by crucifixion, the night before all that, I don't think I'd choose to wash the dirty feet of a bunch of guys. They can wash their own stinkin' feet. As for me, I think I'd be inclined to take it easy that night, maybe even pamper myself, get a massage, [uncork the best bottle of wine], throw a steak on the grill. At the very least I'd allow myself to feel sorry for myself. Jesus doesn't do any of that. No, at all times, he has this habit of humility. It's who he is.

He's not just faking his humility. Even death on a cross is not too lowly for him. He did on the cross what no one else was prepared to do, what no one else could do. He didn't just die on a cross. He died *for us* on a cross. He took on our filth, our crud, the grime of our sin, he took it on as his own and suffered the just punishment for it. Crucifixion was the most painful and humiliating way the Romans could dream up to execute a man; and yet it was not too painful or humiliating for Jesus. God's Son, our Savior never had to pretend to be humble. It's who he is, especially on the cross.

This humility of Jesus also distinguishes him from all the other gods of the nations. If you want or need God to be humble for you, on your behalf, you'll find him no where else. Only Jesus.

In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus did that Thursday night what his disciples were not prepared to do. In dying on a cross the next day, Jesus did what no one else in the world was prepared to do: only the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. All praise be to him! Amen.

