

April 13, 2017
Maundy Thursday
Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31-35
Christ the King Lutheran Church
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Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mealtime was a big deal in my family of origin. Holiday meals were filled with expectation and disappointment. Preparations began days, sometimes weeks in advance. No detail was left to chance. The detailed plans for that first Passover meal make total sense to me. The plans Jesus had for this Passover meal? Not so much.

It makes sense that Jesus, a Jewish teacher, would celebrate Passover, in Jerusalem with his friends and family. It makes sense that the meal would include bread and wine. The meal probably included the same details of the first Passover meal. It makes sense that there would be a place for guests to wash their dusty feet. The disciples knew what to expect of a Passover meal. But, this was no ordinary Passover. What they experienced at this Passover was surprising, even scandalous.

The master removed his robe and washed their feet! Unheard of!

I'm imagining that he washed everyone's feet: including the women and children, not just the men. We imagine this "Last Supper" as a somber meal. What if we re-imagine it as a Passover feast is supposed to be? The Passover is a huge party! It is a celebration, a remembrance of God rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God's instructions to Moses and Aaron were specific. Celebrate this feast annually, remembering what God had done. For centuries, Jews had been celebrating according to those instructions.

Jesus changed the rules! Jesus demonstrated the real meaning of agape love. Serving one another, sharing a meal and conversation, and sharing the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus offered the gathered friends radical hospitality. Even the one who would betray him. The master takes the role of servant. Extraordinary hospitality! Following Jesus' example, we gather on this day to remember and to offer that hospitality to one another.

Is it difficult for you to remove your shoes, or to put them back on? Are you embarrassed by the look of your feet? Do you think your feet smell? Has it been too long since your last pedicure? Are you ticklish? Jesus doesn't care.

Humans crave touch. Babies are soothed by their parents' touch. Toddlers and even middle-schoolers climb on their parents' laps for comfort. We hug one another in joy and in sorrow. Sadly, we have learned to largely suppress that craving.

Jesus invites us into this intimate act. We offer our smelly, weary, unmanicured feet to be cleansed and refreshed. And Jesus washes them. It is an act of service that is unusual and uncomfortably intimate. The disciples are surprised! WE are surprised! Peter, intense Peter goes to the extreme, again . . .

"Lord, you must NEVER wash my feet. But if you're going to wash my feet, wash all of me!"

A misunderstanding, a literalizing of the act of service. It is easy to misunderstand this ritual.

What does our recreation mean? Is it symbolic? Is it real? Is it useful? Is it meaningful?

When coupled with individual absolution and with the Eucharist it is more than symbolic.

It is what Jesus commanded, to love one another as he loved us. We are to serve one another as Jesus served us.

This is the That service may look different today . . .we don't need to wash each other's feet . . . but, I assure you it is a precious gift.

Several years ago I had surgery on each hand. I wore a cast for 5 weeks followed by 5 weeks of physical therapy. Since then I cannot bend my thumbs properly. I cannot hold a nail clipper. I cannot cut my own toenails. I MUST get a regular pedicure. How is it that a stranger can touch my feet when my closest family and friends can not. How is it that I have no problem with a stranger touching my feet (except for the extremely ticklish part) yet I am uncomfortable asking my family and friends?

radical nature of Jesus command, care for one another in love. We do a wonderful job of caring for one another in times of crisis. We bring food and flowers and cards, and I thank you for the care you've given Carl & me.

What if that tender care extended to touch? Touching not just the people we know, but touching the untouchables as Jesus touched the lepers. Touching the people we are angry with, like Jesus washed the feet of Judas Iscariot.

Meals are a big deal! The rituals surrounding meals are a big deal. This feast of thanksgiving is a big deal!

Washed and forgiven Jesus invites us to come to this meal where we will touch and taste his body and his blood. And . . . Jesus promises to be at the party, every time we gather to remember

Thanks be to God!