Feb. 25, 2018 Jesus Washes Feet John 13:1-17 (Psalm 51:7-12) Liturgical color: Purple

PRAYER OF THE DAY Holy Lord God, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet as a sign of service and compassion. Show us how to live and love in service and with compassion, for the sake of all your children. Amen.

*HYMNS Jesus, priceless treasure ELW 775, UMH 532, NCH 480 God, whose giving knows no ending ELW 678, NCH 565 Lord, whose love in humble service ELW 712 CHORAL Amazing grace, John Bertalot*

Psalm 51:

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Children’s Message:

**Foot washing?** Towel, water… Peter had it wrong then got it right… good example for making mistakes *(bring a flip-flop) even little keychain one with John 13:8-9 written on it*

**Announcements Prayers**

 Funeral of Harold O’Brien is tomorrow (Ron’s dad) Gethsemane

Cemetery on Kutztown Rd in Reading

Judas is in the room, and the devil had already put it into his heart to betray Jesus. At the same time, Jesus also had certainty inside of him… he knew he was about to return to God. And they were at the same table, more than that, the same Passover table; this is the third Passover meal in the gospel of John… the 3rd year of Jesus’ ministry… this is the big moment… the earthly travelling ministry of Jesus… ‘it is finished.’ These are the last days until Jesus says from the cross “it is finished.” (John 19:30)

John’s gospel is unique from the others in many ways… but this may be one of the most significant differences: in John’s gospel, Jesus says **no** words of institution ushering in Holy Communion… no, that’s not anywhere in this gospel… no instead

Jesus raised himself up; he took off his outer robe… a rather intimate action, but not the most humiliating thing to do among friends; no that was coming soon, Jesus tied a towel around himself, which he used to wipe the feet of his disciples. The tired, dusty, maybe sore, probably stinky feet of the disciples.

Talk about a giant flip-flop. Sure Peter flip-flopped with his reaction as I mentioned in the children’s message… but THIS is HUGE!! A teacher would NEVER wash a student’s feet. A free man would never wash the feet of another free man; even for a slave this was a humiliating act that was rarely expected, and then the humiliating act of washing was almost always by a woman (like Mary anointing the feet of Jesus and washing them with her hair). Jesus humiliated himself even more than Mary had just the week before by anointing Jesus days before he entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, to shouts of Hosanna and crowds waving palm branches to honor and welcome Jesus into the city… on a day we know as Palm Sunday. (But we’ll come back to that part of chapter 12 in a few weeks.)

Here we are, not many days later, and the praised Messiah, the embodiment of the law and the answer of the prophets, the anointed one of God… is completely humiliating himself, stripped-down, bowed down, lower than a slave for his followers, including the one who would betray him.

We know that evil mingles among gatherings… remember being horrified on Ash Wednesday, when a shooter leaves the terrifying scene of carnage along with the crowd of students, and hangs-out in a commercial district, buying a soda to pass the time. Here at the Passover table, the evil is already in the heart of Judas… yet Jesus does not remove Judas, not yet. Jesus washes the feet of Judas, and Peter and John, Andrew, James, Nathaniel and Phillip… and all his disciples. They do not clearly recognize Jesus even after all the signs pointing to him as messiah: the teaching with authority, feeding 5,000, the blind see, the lame walk, and the other miracles including raising Lazarus from his tomb of death to new life… and now at least Peter is quite sure that Jesus has lost his mind… I will never let you wash my feet… I will never let you humiliate yourself in this way, I will never let you stoop so low to serve me… I will never…

And Jesus lovingly responds, acknowledging that Peter cannot understand now; but still must accept this great gift from Jesus in order to have a share in all that is to come. The gifts of great love starting with compassionate, humiliating foot washing. As I have done; you also should do as I have done.

Jesus washed the feet of Disciples, the sore stinky feet of the disciples who wrestle with questions like: ‘What good can come out of Nazareth?’ (John 1:46) and ‘Are you the Messiah or should we look for someone else?’ Some of the other disciples, the ones in addition to the 12 had already left; there were some that just could not believe the truth about Jesus (John 6:64) Jesus had given the 12 the chance to go also saying “do you also wish to go away?” Peter spoke for all of them, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68)… yet Jesus responded that all 12 were chosen but one was a devil… (John 6:70). And here after the foot washing the evil will come-out… in fact the evil will leave the comfort of the fold; leaving from the Passover meal, out through the door, trying to leave this relationship with Jesus at night. (John 13:30)’[[1]](#footnote-1) Remember there is **one** sin in John’s Gospel… separation from a relationship with God… that is the sin that Judas commits that night. In John’s gospel Jesus hands himself over to the soldiers and policemen in the garden of Gethsemane without any kiss from Judas. (John 18:1-12) The betrayal is when Judas goes out with the intention to leave Jesus.

Jesus the humiliated servant, Jesus who from the beginning was the Word and was God… Jesus for whom this entire relationship is about love… not brotherly love, not romantic love, but agape- love, unconditional love; lay-down-one’s-life-kind-of-love. That’s the love where this reading begins “Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end.” And Jesus sums-up this love, this foot-washing, meal sharing, evil including love with these words to his disciples:

**As I have done; you also should do as I have done.** What does this look like? **As I have done; you also should do as I have done.** This means responding to hate and evil with compassionate service **As I have done; you also should do as I have done.** This means swallowing pride, and lifting-up those we might rather consider lowly **As I have done; you also should do as I have done**. This means advocating for equality, respecting human rights even of people who cause harm or stir-up fear **As I have done; you also should do as I have done.** This means rejoicing with joy at salvation for broken sinners and welcoming such people in the name of Christ Jesus.

That’s how God so loved the world… and this is how we are to live lives of thanksgiving for that same sacrificial, salvation, love… by loving others as Christ first loved us. And there is this: servants are not greater than their master; nor messengers greater than the one who sent them… as followers of Jesus we are to serve; we are to carry the message of our Servant savior… we are blessed… “love is the best answer to every hurting stinky thing in the world. It is God’s answer, Jesus’ answer, and it is to be ours.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

I saw an example of this on Thursday night… there was a clip on the news that night from the Gov. Mifflin high school auditorium the reporter summarized that tensions were running high as they showed a woman raising her voice right behind me… what they did not mention is that she was encouraging restraint, she was speaking for respect, she was rebuking some of the hateful things that were said moments before. And Steven Gerhard the superintendent not long after was nearly moved to tears after an opposing voice vehemently suggested some very specific ideas about what to do to the 14 year-old boy who he called evil because his very inappropriate post had gone viral, and caused 4 days of criminal investigations including the DA’s office and the FBI and ultimately spawned a rumor that led to half the student body to pour out of school at 11am Wednesday terrified that a shooter was coming that afternoon. The super-intendent said, it’s also my job to care for this boy and his family.

Love in the face of evil… that’s what Jesus expects. Love in the face of evil that what Jesus models. Love in the face of evil, loving service, loving cleansing, loving feeding, loving understanding…

‘Go to 6:64 Judas did not believe; **betrayal** (Jesus hands himself over – I lay-down my own life) **is to leave the fold and not to recognize who Jesus is**… to leave the relationship AND it was **night**!! (John 13:30)’[[3]](#footnote-3)

This is the center of the reason Jesus came to earth to live among us… as captured in the gospel of John. God so loved the world that he gave his only, unique son… and that only unique Son, gave of himself to the point of utter humiliation… even though not all of his disciples were clean, even though there was evil at the table…

Jesus became a servant to all… and expects all of his followers to do likewise. To love in the face of evil. To serve even when it is humiliating or unwelcome. To be a messenger, to be a servant of all…

And there is this: servants are not greater than their master; nor messengers greater than the one who sent them… as followers of Jesus we are to serve; we are to carry the message of our Servant savior… we are blessed… “love is the best answer to every hurting stinky thing in the world. It is God’s answer and Jesus’ answer, and it is to be ours.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Because Jesus laid down his outer robe and because Jesus laid down his life {add the part about the end and it is finished}

Working preacher podcast:

Skipped chapter 12 – Mary anointing Jesus’ feet at Palm Sunday entrance

Foot washing immediately before betrayal announcement look at parallels of Mary anointing and Jesus washing feet

?Peter’s reaction: in ancient world people washed their own feet. Good host would offer a basin of water to guests (Gen 18). Or a slave in Jewish and Greek circles; almost always females… and NO free person would wash the feet of another free person

Only as a show of utter devotion would foot washing happen (Craig Koester)

Jesus wipes disciple’s feet with what he’s wearing!

This is what love, power and authority looks like! In a room where betrayal is present (Judas hasn’t left yet)

Love is militant opposition to destructive powers of evil

{talk of threat to school and kids pouring out of school to go home}

After this, Judas leaves to betray

Flip-flop shoe ☺ Peter’s great flip flop

If you don’t do this, forget it… oh, I need this? Give me more!

Verse 11 not all of you are clean – Judas… having had his feet washed why does Judas betray? No reason given. ‘why uncle Paul is believer and aunt June isn’t’?? no easy answer

Go to 6:64 Judas did not believe; betrayal (Jesus hands himself over – I lay-down my own life) is to leave the fold and not to recognize who Jesus is… to leave the relationship AND it was **night**!! (John 13:30) No words of institution in John’s gospel… only bread of Passover.

Why don’t people recognize Jesus?

John 13 commentary – Working preacher

“It has taken 12 chapters to reach the eve of John’s third Passover.

It will take five more to walk through this single evening with Jesus and his own. The long night will not end until the cock crows and Jesus is handed over to Pilate at daybreak in 18:27-28. But first are these five chapters in which Jesus comforts his friends and prepares them to love as he has loved. This begins with the foot washing. {which will be mostly skipped in our readings this year – please read at home}

Love is the first main verb of the passage in Greek. It rises from a sea of subordinate clauses in John 13:1-3. Love governs all of that, all that has come before, and all that is to come. Because everything else is subordinate, love and the foot washing as an expression of that love emerge as Jesus’ informed response to all of it: the festival and with it the unfolding of Jesus’ hour, the world beloved and dark, Satan and Judas, Jesus’ own in the world then and now.

The word for end in the phrase “he loved them to the end” appears in its verbal form in John 19:30 where Jesus’ last words on the cross are “It is finished.” That completion, fulfillment, perfection of love is anticipated in the love enacted in the foot washing here, which overturns societal expectations as the cross overturns expectations of what a savior should be.

There is no last supper in John. Only Judas eats. There are echoes of Eucharist in the feeding and the associated discourse (John 6:11, 35-58) and again in the resurrection breakfast on the shore (21:13). But the primary act of radical, self-giving, poured-out love that plays out on Jesus’ last night isn’t in broken bread but in Jesus washing the dusty, sweaty feet of his own.

The only other dinner in John comes a chapter earlier, six days before this Passover. Each Passover in John is associated in some way with Jesus’ body and with dying and rising. At the dinner in John 12:1-8, we find Mary, Lazarus’ sister, anointing Jesus’ feet with perfume and wiping them with her hair. This is explicitly associated with the raising of Lazarus, with Jesus’ own burial, and with Judas, who protests, pretending to care about the poor when he is merely a thief. The Bethany siblings are the only people, other than the Father himself, whom Jesus is specifically said to love until the mention of the disciple whose only name is the verb love in John 13:23. So Mary’s act of love serves as a pre-enactment of Jesus’ and a demonstration of the extravagant love we are to show him and one another.

After the first main verb love, the next ones do not come until John 13:4-5 when we reach the deliberate unfolding of the foot washing in Jesus’ rising, laying down, taking up, wrapping round, and pouring before he begins to wash and dry the disciples’ feet. This happens in reverse in 13:12. Then Jesus explains that he has overturned expectations in this act of radical love as an example for all who call him teacher and Lord. {Jesus explaining what seems like an expectational flip-flop of Messiah}

Jesus’ laying down and taking up of his robe may hold echoes of the good shepherd who lays down his life and takes it up again for the sheep (John 10:11-18). But above all the love expressed in the foot washing directs us to the mystery of love’s fulfillment on the cross and in the future opening out beyond that.

If we cannot feel the radical nature of the foot washing ourselves, we can experience it vicariously through Peter, who rejects it in the clearest possible terms. Jesus, he says, will never ever for all time wash his feet. Peter reacts in a similar way when Jesus tells him he cannot yet follow (John 13:36-38). We have a chance to consider Peter in next week’s text. For now his response invites us to consider our own understanding of what it means to let Jesus love us.

How hard it can be to accept that we are Jesus’ own, that we are already clean, and then to accept that we are always with him and he with us and that God continues to cleanse even the parts of us that we consider most unworthy of his gaze, the less lovely parts we’d prefer to hide away under layers of our best selves. But God who sends light into the impenetrable darkness of the world is certainly not daunted by our small brokenness, and love is the best answer to every hurting stinky thing in the world. It is God’s answer and Jesus’ answer, and it is to be ours.

This is made explicit in the explanation of the foot washing (John 13:13-17) and again in the threefold love commandment (13:34-35) and its reiteration in 15:12. We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Our love emerges from his, as branches grow from a vine. The word clean (13:10) has the same root as the verb prune (15:2). What Peter and we may perceive as something shameful, God sees as an opportunity to refine a branch already growing out of the beautiful Word-vine so that it can bear more fruit in love.

God’s love poured out before us at our feet is the lesser scandal pointing to the greater, more mysterious scandal of the cross when God allows the vulnerability of the divine love enfleshed to extend to the furthest extent, to be defenseless before lying, power-grasping, Caesar-worshipping authorities of church and state.

Then, in love’s greatest act of all, the broken one returns quietly to a weeping woman in a garden and a bunch of fearful followers locked away in the dark Jerusalem night and lets them touch his broken parts as he breathes the Spirit of truth upon them.

All of John is the story of God’s love for the world, and John 13 is that love displayed in the specificity of Jesus’ love for his own. Our participation in the vulnerable, mysterious, live-giving love of God begins with Jesus before us, humbling himself and us. It is in pouring ourselves out in love as the beloved teacher has done and as he makes possible in us that we become able to function as his servants, his sent ones, his friends, reflections of his light in the dark world God loves.

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1. Working preacher podcast John 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Meda Stamper Working Preacher commentary John 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Working preacher podcast John 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Meda Stamper Working Preacher commentary John 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)