

Maundy Thursday Reflection on John 13 v1 to 17 and 31b to 35

It is perhaps debatable if love can be called love at all if one does not back up the words “I love you” with actions that show the truth of it. Many a couple and many a parent or child have wondered this very thing when the person who professes to love them seems to be anything but loving.

Jesus today shows us love in action. It is an absolutely amazing love, surpassing what we would normally think of when we think of love for our friends.

He gets down on his knees and washes the feet of his disciples. This is the chore that the slave of the household – or the lowliest of the servants – would normally perform. Jesus is making a very important point to his disciples, and us, about how we are to live. He says, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

The foot washing is not only a symbol of humility. It is a symbol of hospitality. The job was a dirty one but it was extremely important. To wash someone’s feet was to recognize them as a welcome guest, to remove any barriers that might keep them from the table. Even though it is not normally the host doing the actual washing, notice that it is the host’s job to remove the barriers to his table. We are able to feast at God’s table each week because God, our host, has torn down the barrier that separated us from him. In our baptisms – baptized into Christ –

we began the long process of becoming a new creation, clothed in Christ's righteousness, brought into relationship with God.

It is now our job to remove the barriers to God's table so that all people can feast with us, in relationship with God. This means we must ask ourselves what barriers remain. Why are there not more people feasting with us at God's table? Do we believe we are hospitable but then we say inhospitable things in our communities? Do we think we are inclusive but then we say and do things that show we are actually only inclusive of certain people? What if only the destitute of our community showed up on Sundays – the ones who cannot afford to contribute to our finances? What if only non-binary people filled the pews on Sunday mornings – those individuals who do not use the gender specific pronouns of "he" or "she" but instead use "they" and "them"? We may have erected barriers that we do not see.

Jesus tells us to serve one another as he has served us. Jesus tells us to love one another as he has loved us. This brings us back to where I started: Jesus shows us an absolutely amazing love, surpassing what we would normally think of when we think of love for our friends. It is an amazing act of love not simply because he washed the feet of his disciples, not because he performed the task of a servant or slave, not only because he washed away the barriers keeping them from his table. Why was it so amazing?

John writes, "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God" and so he got up from the table and washed and dried the feet of each of his disciples. Knowing who they were and what they would do, Jesus washed their feet. Jesus knew that all of his

disciples would desert him but he washed their feet. Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny being one of his followers, he was going to deny even knowing him – and he was going to deny him three times...but Jesus washes his feet. He knew that Judas was going to be the one to hand him over to the authorities for a handful of silver...but Jesus washes his feet.

Imperfect, broken, undeserving humans that they were, Jesus washes their feet. That is the amazing love of God. Knowing who we are, what we have done, and what we will do...Jesus washes our feet, welcomes us to his table, and loves us – the sinners that we are.

And that is what Jesus then commands us to do. “I have set you an example,” he tells us, “that you should do as I have done for you.” This amazing love that he extends to us in our brokenness is the love we are asked to extend to others – to *all* others in their brokenness – through serving, through hospitality.

Perhaps the hardest example for us to follow is that Jesus washes Judas’ feet. Jesus washes the feet of the person who had already been prompted by the devil to betray him, the one he knew was not chosen. This is a tough act to follow. We like to think we know who God will accept and who God will reject but Jesus shows us what we are to do. We serve and we love. We welcome and include. God does the judging.

“Now that you know these things” says Jesus, “you will be blessed if you do them.”