

Maundy Thursday Sermon from Vicar Lauren Blatt -

Maundy Thursday has a variety of different readings. We heard about the last supper from Paul, and we heard about Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John's gospel. The feet washing in John's gospel replaces the last supper, but it's just as important.

Jesus, their teacher, their leader gets on his hands and knees and washes their crummy dirt laden feet. He stoops down and cleanses them, which he tells them is necessary before his death.

I can't even imagine what the disciples must have been feeling. They know that their close companion over the last three years is preparing to die, he invites them to a place, and does something they least expect... gets down, as a servant, and washes.

It was custom that the servants would wash the feet of guests before they would dine with the household. I don't know that we are all that surprised that Jesus does this, I mean we know that Jesus frequently does what is least expected... Jesus allowed a woman to wash his feet with her tears and hair, Jesus eats with sinners, Jesus (god) comes to earth as a baby [in a barn, next to dirty animals], he spends his time not with royalty but fishermen and tax collectors... over and over again Jesus does the opposite of what everyone expects Jesus to do --

Jesus keeps doing the unexpected up until Jesus dies the death of a criminal on a cross.

Jesus shows up at the last place we would reasonably look...
Throughout this service you will hear us refer to "common elements"
The profundity of this!
Jesus shows up in water...
Jesus shows up in wine... in bread... in sadness...in shame... in hurt...
On a cross on Golgotha

Our God is not the God who demands to be carried into town in a golden carriage led by white steeds. Our God is not the God who demands dinner servants to wash his feet and serve him the finest of foods, our God is not the God who rises to political leadership overthrowing governments and secular powers...

Our God is the King of the Jews, the one who rides in on a donkey, who washes the feet of his students, who feeds them with bread and wine, the one who dies on a cross because he's dejected... Maybe this doesn't seem like a big deal but the reality is that the honor and shame dichotomy of the first century was one of great importance. The idea was to do things that would bring honor to oneself and one's family and to avoid things that bring shame... It's a really big deal that Jesus humbles himself enough to wash his disciples' feet.

In one of my favorite hymns, "Lord You Give the Great Commission" the third verse begins like this: Lord, you make the common holy: "This my body, this my blood."

Our God takes common things and makes them holy. Our God takes us and makes us holy... We, broken and sinful people, are made right before God because of what Christ did for us on the cross and his glorious resurrection on Easter morning...

Oswald Chambers, a 20th century Scottish Baptist said this, "In the cross [and I'd add in all that Jesus does] we see the dimensions of Divine love. The cross is not the cross of a man, but the exhibition of the heart of God. At the back of the wall of the world stands God with arms outstretched, and every person driven there is driven into the arms of God. The cross of Jesus is the supreme evidence of the love of God."

Today marks the end of Lent and the beginning of the great three days, which bridge our Lenten journey to the resurrection of our Lord. Lent helped us to focus on fasting and repentance, but the readings for this day and the liturgy that we will partake in force us to look at ourselves through Jesus call to radical servanthood. Jesus calls us to wash the feet of others, and to love. Jesus gives us the great commission:

Lord, you give the great commission:
"Heal the sick and preach the word."
Lest the Church neglect its mission
and the Gospel go unheard,
help us witness to your purpose
with renewed integrity;
with the Spirit's gifts empower us
for the work of ministry.

Lord, you show us love's true measure:
"Father, what they do, forgive."
Yet we hoard as private treasure
all that you so freely give.
May your care and mercy lead us
to a just society;
with the Spirit's gifts empower us
for the work of ministry.

This day forces us to recognize that we do not treat others with the love and respect that Jesus treated his disciples... And within that realization we are moved past the anointing, feet washing, and communion and into the stripping of the altar... the moving words of Psalm 22 "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me..." and onto Good Friday. Jesus is tortured, humiliated, and nailed to a tree for the sake of humanity.

The discomfort that you may feel when considering foot washing is just the discomfort that God calls us to live into. God calls us to live into the discomfort of radical hospitality and radical love. I invite you to live into that reality here... to allow your discomfort to be present; this discomfort is precisely what Jesus calls us to offer up daily: our discomfort with baring our need and exposing ourselves to the needs of others.

Amen