

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10) 11-14

¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord-and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

"In the Shadow"

The shadows lengthen and time moves on. The shift has happened and it is come about. The journey of these weeks has now taken a turn as we enter the Triduum. These are the three days. The day of the Upper Room, the garden in Gethsemane, the betrayal and the trial, then there is the crucifixion, and the entombment of his body...we mark these three days by these events. And it is here that we remember what took place at table and with his disciples.

“Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another as I have loved you. This is my new commandment.”

It is where the word “Maundy” comes from. It comes from the Latin mandatum which means command. The command is very clear here. It is specific. Specifics are part and parcel of this relationship with God. So in John’s gospel, all this takes place on the night of preparation. See, he shifts it a day earlier than the Synoptic Gospels do.

We are to recall that it is Passover. And what is being remembered is what took place in Egypt. We are to remember the promise that God would do all that God needed to do in order to deliver God’s people from the hands of those who enslaved them. We are to remember the details of how it went when the presence of God would literally pass-over Egypt that night. The lamb that was to be selected and then slaughtered and roasted whole. The bread without yeast—made in a hurry for people who are on the go. The blood on the doorpost spread and symbolized as a marking that the presence of death was to pass-over and pass by that house.

John makes it so clear that all this takes place on that day of preparation. That Jesus is killed then. This makes him the lamb of sacrifice. As that comes about in the Gospel of John there is this extended table narrative. It is that scene that forms the context in which feet are washed and the new commandment is instituted.

We are supposed to hear this personally. “Love one another as I have loved you.” Love? What does it mean to love? “Love one another as I have loved you.”

“How has Jesus loved?”

We are so used to thinking about love in terms of feelings. But as we look at God's history with humanity, and then as we look deep into the life of Jesus—especially as we are drawn into the Triduum of these three days—we see that it goes beyond feelings and is about choice.

The kind of choices Jesus makes answer the question of “how has Jesus loved?” “Love one another as I have loved you.” We are the beloved disciples, and it is the love part that stands out as the more prominent.

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“How has Jesus loved?” We see it in the table.

Paul writes those wonderful words, those words of institution. *“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that on the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, also, after supper, he took the cup saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this as often as you drink it.”* Then Paul adds those words, *“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

Bread and wine. They were ordinary elements that were common to almost every meal. They would have been there as part of the daily sustenance. Jesus takes them, and he gives them to us. He hands them over to us before he is handed over.

Think about those words, “handed over.” Think about it. It was Jesus who was handed over. Handed over into the hands of those who would curse him, and mock him, and beat him, and kill him. He was handed over.

At the hands of his betrayer—yes, but realize it was he himself who did the handing over. Jesus handed himself over to this humiliating death. There is this old hymn that goes like this: *“They bound the hands of Jesus in the garden where he prayed. They led him through the streets in shame. They spat upon the savior so pure and free from sin. They said, crucify him, he’s to blame. He could have called ten thousand angels to the destroy the world and set him free. He could have called ten thousand angels, but he died alone, for you and me.”*

It was of his own will that he allowed himself to be handed over. It was of his own will that he allowed himself to be handed over for suffering, crucifixion, and death. It was of his own will....

It was an act of love. It was a choice of love.

“This is my body, broken for you.”

“This is my blood, shed for you.”

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

And so we are to remember. We are to remember that night. We are to remember what happened then. We are to remember that this was a powerful action of love. We are to remember that this is about his choice to love us still and forever.

We are to remember that it was in that Upper Room that he showed us who he is—“as I have loved you.” And we are to remember every time that we eat this bread and drink this cup. We are to remember and remember forward to that great banquet where one day we will feast with those of all ages.

We are to remember how Jesus has loved us, and in bread and cup our memories get jogged.

“Love one another as I have loved you.” How has Jesus loved us? In being handed over, and in service.

He removes his outer wrapping. He takes a towel and ties the towel around himself. He takes a basin of water and bends down and washes the disciple’s feet.

The Lord of all creation—see him there, bent down and washing their feet.

The humbleness of this service is lost on us. Foot washing was part of the hospitality of that society. It was, but the way it worked was the host was generous in the sense that the host provided you with a basin of water and you then washed your own feet.

In Jewish Midrash we learn about foot washing that even a Hebrew slave would not be required to do the washing of another’s feet. It was that lowly of a service. So when the woman of Luke’s gospel washes Jesus feet and when Jesus takes to washing the disciples’ feet there is a true and clear action of humbleness going on here.

This is about love—the kind of love that Jesus has for us is a bending down and meeting us in all our humiliation and pain kind of love. It is an incredible love that prefers us and our needs over his own comforts.

It is this “as I have loved you” form of love that Jesus invites into. It is that choosing to love—so epitomized in the washing of feet. It is a love of serving others; it is a counter cultural love. Both the overt and the silent messages of our culture are me first and it is all about self love.

Jesus shows us in his life a still more excellent way.

“Love one another as I have loved you.” It is that love. It is that connection. It is so real in Christ. That connection—that connectedness.

It is in John’s Gospel where he uses the vine metaphor. On Sunday evening, at our Christian Seder the question was asked of Matthew Ciccotelli—why do we drink the wine at the table. And he responded with the words of John—almost quoting them exactly—“because of the vine and the branches...I am the vine and you are the branches.”

It is that connection. Notice the kind of love that Jesus loves us with. The brayer—Judas—does Jesus wash his feet? Yes. Peter, the protestor the outspoken one who thinks he has all the insights but then denies Jesus—does Jesus wash his feet? Yes. What about us? With all our own betrayals and denials? Would Jesus wash our feet? He has...he has.

He washed out feet. He prayed for us in the garden. He looked to us as he carried the cross and endured the weight of that cross.

To us. For us. Connected. “I am the vine. You are the branches. Cut off from me you can do nothing.”

Every time we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Watch and pray. Amen.