

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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We heard Jesus say, “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” Hmm. Wash another’s feet? Every Maundy Thursday it’s a struggle to encourage this practice; and tonight, how would we do that from six feet away? How, Jesus? How? This is the question I’ve been asking for most of our planning for these Three Day. How do we do this, and how do we do that virtually? And, on this night, when foot washing is the center of this gospel text, and when we usually gather for a variety of communal, embodied experiences—how do we do this?

As we try these rituals in new ways, perhaps this Maundy Thursday might illuminate our faith. And, really quick, it’s not “Monday Thursday”—I’m not re-arranging the week, but rather, it’s Maundy. And, Maundy is a derivative of the Latin word for “commandment.” That is, tonight, we focus on the command of Jesus to “love one another” as Jesus loved his disciples (John 13:34). At face value, Jesus loved by washing the disciple’s feet and so, we need to love like Jesus and do that foot washing thing. So, that is why I’ll ask you to grab your mask and your quarantine cohort and wash one another’s feet. I can hear it

already, “well, wait one second, Pastor Jason, you didn’t tell us to get water and towels.” Oh, my! You’re right! And, good thing for us that foot washing wasn’t Jesus’ emphasis. Instead, love was the focus. And, a specific type of love, namely sacrificial love.

And before we unpack “sacrificial love” a bit more, I want to imagine Jesus’ state of mind as he knelt at the washbasin. You see, often times, when we focus on one little part of the larger Biblical narrative we forget that this episode doesn’t stand alone. Instead, as Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber reminds us, tonight’s encounter is a part of a larger story. It’s a story where, less than one chapter ago, Jesus *received* love.

Do you remember that story? It was that time when Jesus was at a small gathering with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They were eating, drinking, and being merry. As their celebration continued, Mary grabbed a very costly jar of perfume. And, it wasn’t any old perfume, it was a perfume that was traditionally used to anoint the dead. Then, she walked over to her friend Jesus, whom she loved so dearly. This dear friend who, if you remember, had raised her brother Lazarus from the dead. This friend whose future didn’t look so lengthy or lively. After all, it was because of Jesus that the citizens no longer trusted their leaders. For, the leaders were only looking to boost their own

authority at any cost. And, Jesus disrupted the status quo to these leaders needed to keep their power and influence. So, as you can imagine, that didn't go over well. And, all of this was probably going through Mary's mind as she walked toward Jesus. As she got closer to Jesus, she removed the lid to that perfume, then poured the perfume on Jesus' feet, and having no towel nearby, she used her unbound hair to wipe them.

Then we get to today's story. It was five days later, and Jesus was at another dinner table with his beloved disciples. In between the anointing with perfume and kneeling at the wash basin, I wonder how Jesus received Mary's love? Was he hesitant? Was he suspicious? Maybe, even, resistant, embarrassed, or annoyed? It's hard to tell. But, what we do know is that after that meal with his disciples, Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). Could it be that the love he received from Mary gave him the strength to love his disciples? And not to just love them when everything is going well, but also to love these disciples when he was betrayed, abandoned, and denied. Or, as John's gospel puts it, as Jesus loved them "to the end." Maybe, we can learn from Jesus how to recognize the love that God gives us through others, so that we can be empowered to

sacrificially love another. After all, that is a key part of our Lutheran faith, namely that God first loves us, comes to us, meets us where we are, and encounters us, without our need to do anything at all. It is, then, from that encounter that we too can sacrificially love another.¹

And, our sacrificial love, mostly likely won't look like Jesus' action, and that's okay. When I read how Jesus took off his outer robe and wrapped himself in a towel, Pastor Tim Brown got me thinking about what a sacrificial servant might wear tonight. And, I think that the towel that Jesus wore probably looks a lot like PPE—that is, face-shields, masks, and rubber gloves. It's the aprons on the attendants that work overtime in the grocery store. It's the pajamas that have replaced business suits. These are the towels that we wear right now. And, tonight, tomorrow, and on Tuesday, many of us will wash each other's feet by staying away from another's feet. Essential workers will wash feet by going into work once again. Business folks will wash feet by making masks and ventilators instead of mattresses and automobiles. You see, Pastor Brown reminds us that a servant looks different at particular moments

¹<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&view=btopen&ver=345z24z9muf7&q=nadia&qs=true&search=query&th=%23thread-f%3A1663495358790127463&qt=nadia.1.nadia%27s.1&cvid=2>

in of our lives. In these days, the servant garb looks a lot like scrubs, pajamas, and aprons. These are our towels for this Maundy Thursday.²

So, on this night, as we remember Christ's commandment to love one another, we recall that we were first loved by our God. We were loved and now we can love our neighbor. Tonight, tomorrow, and on Tuesday, we wear our servant garb—our scrubs, pajamas, or aprons. For, we wash each other's feet when we recall how Christ loved and respond with that same love. Amen.

²<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&view=bt&ver=345z24z9muf7&q=falling&qs=true&search=query&th=%23thread-f%3A1663425559634836675&qt=fall.1.falling.1&cvid=1>