

# Maundy Thursday Sermon

In the name of the creator, redeemer, and sustainer, Amen.

I remember the first hug I received after I was fully vaccinated during the pandemic. My granny had just passed away and I couldn't travel back for her funeral. A good friend of mine at Seminary walked up to me, saw the tears welling up in my eyes, and asked if it was ok to give me a hug. All I could do was nod in acceptance. She threw her arms around me, and I just burst out into tears, it was more than my grief for my granny it was pent-up grief from the extended isolation from human touch.

This was a grief I wasn't even aware I was carrying. As I hugged my friend, I realized so much was changing, so much had already changed. I was hugging my friend, still masked, still living in virtual isolation and uncertainty, but we knew we had each other and that one moment of human connection.

In our Gospel text for this evening, we find Jesus at dinner with the disciples. He knows of Judas' betrayal and that Peter will deny him.

Yet he goes about washing all the disciple's feet anyway and tells them to do the same for each other. Even as Peter questions and denies Jesus, we hear Jesus try to connect the pieces for his disciples while still acknowledging that they will not understand what he has done for them until later.

As Jesus washes their feet Jesus is also calling them into a different kind of relationship with each other. One that has a mutuality to it where they must not only know themselves as equals but also act as equals.

This idea of knowledge leading to action manifests in Jesus' new commandment to the disciples as Jesus says. "I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have a love for one another.”

This is a unique kind of love translated as agape. Agape isn't a feeling or knowing but an action. To love as God loves. It is a kind of sacrificial love that in so many ways is aspirational, yet, as Christ showed, the disciples exists in the simple act of washing feet and having one's feet be washed.

While this type of love is also exemplified through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, we are reminded that to give of oneself can be to acknowledge the humanity of another and love them.

To give of ourselves in the ways we are able. To smile at a stranger in the street, say hello to the grocery checkout person, or extend kindness to someone we dislike or may have a different opinion.

To follow the example of Jesus and show love to one another, the kind of agape love that exemplifies God's love for us is an active love. A love full of humility that considers others and is community-minded and without condition. To love one another as God has loved us.

This text also reminds us that we must also be willing to receive the love of our neighbor. Peter's response to Jesus hit a little too close to home for me as I often hear myself saying things like, "No, I'm fine; no help needed here." Even when I'm exhausted or know that's not quite true.

Maybe you can relate to that as well.

This text reminds us that accepting help and being vulnerable is also part of the work we are called to.

If we don't know what it means to be the one having our feet washed, then how might we truly act from a place of humility?

This text reminds us to ground ourselves in what it means to be on the receiving end of God's love before we try to share that love with others to feel our own vulnerability to serve from a place of empathy, not sympathy.

As Jesus washed the feet of those who would betray him, it sets a powerful example for us in our own work of reconciliation.

It is a reminder to us that there was a mutual invitation in Jesus' actions here. Not only is there an invitation but a willingness to receive.

In reconciliation work all parties must be actively involved in the process. Just as agape is an active love the reconciliation that Jesus calls us to here is an active practice in our faith.

As Jesus continues to teach the disciples, he continues his invitation to true hospitality where all present are equals at the table.

As we gather here today in person for this holy time, I'm reminded of that feeling of immense joy yet unavoidable grief I felt in Seminary.

Maybe it's because I'm again entering into another time of change and discernment, still working through so many questions about what was, what is, and what is yet to come. As many of us gathered here are.

I feel that is why tonight's Gospel text resonates deeply with me. The disciples may not have known the fullness of what was happening, yet they may have had a sense of it.

All of our speculation about how they may have been feeling and how that led to their actions is simply that speculation, yet I choose to believe that their love for each other and their love for Jesus would have clued them into the worry and changes happening with their friend. I wonder if the weight of the end of his time drawing near began to show on Jesus' face or in his voice. Maybe as he says, "Where I am going you cannot come".

In that moment in the text, I could feel a sense of sadness for Jesus and his friends. Maybe as my friend did, they would have offered Jesus an embrace.

Maybe there are moments in this story that resonate for you as well.

As we experience the next three days of prayer, community and Jesus' journey to the cross. I hope that we are able to listen deeply to these ancient texts in new ways. Hear the stories with fresh hearts and minds.

My prayer for us all is that this Holy act of washing feet and sharing in the Eucharist brings us together as a community, closer to God, and closer to walking in the ways Christ has taught us all. **Amen**