

Maundy Thursday | St. John 13:1-15  
April 13, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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O Lord God, You have left to us in this wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Your Passion: Grant, we beseech You, that we may so use this Sacrament of Your body and blood, that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; You, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this afternoon/evening is taken from the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For He knew who was to betray Him; that was why He said, "Not all of you are clean." / When he had washed their feet and put on His outer garments and resumed His place, He said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who loves you and gave Himself for you (Gal. 2:20), dear fellow redeemed:

If you knew that you had only one day of your life on earth left, what would you do with it? Let's assume you were in perfect health and could do anything you wanted. You might decide to spend that day with just your closest family and friends, or maybe you would invite everyone you know to a big party so all would have the chance to say good-bye. The day would certainly not be "business as usual." It would be a day mixed with sadness and anticipation as you prepared to leave this world and enter another.

Jesus knew that His earthly end was near. He knew *“that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father”* (v. 1). He knew *“that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God”* (v. 3). He knew that one of His closest disciples would betray Him to the Jewish leaders (v. 11). He had knowledge of all these things because He was God. His pending death was not hidden from Him, or the awful manner in which He would die.

So what is it that Jesus did with this knowledge? How did He spend His final hours before His death? He did what any Jewish person would have been expected to do; He celebrated the Passover. He sat down with His disciples to a meal of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and wine (Ex. 12:8). This was to remember the LORD’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The LORD passed over the homes with the blood of the lamb painted on their doorposts, but struck down the firstborn sons of every Egyptian man and beast.

## I

As He reclined at table, Jesus revealed that this Passover meal was not like the ones His disciples had shared with Him in the past. He said, *“I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God”* (Lk. 22:15-16). He also used the occasion to teach a lesson about humility and sacrifice. He got up from the meal, removed His outer garments like a servant would, and began to wash the disciples’ dirty feet. This was not what they expected! Peter protested, saying that Jesus would never wash his feet. Jesus insisted, telling him, *“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me”* (v. 8).

This is how Jesus spent His last moments – wiping the dirt and dust from between the disciples’ toes. Such a lowly activity is not what you and I would plan for our last day on earth. We might do some kind things for others, but whatever we did would be as much for self-fulfillment as sacrifice. The lesson Jesus teaches, is that we should look beyond ourselves, to consider others as much higher than we are. Jesus says, *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”* (v. 14). He showed love to His neighbors, including Judas, whom He knew was about to betray Him. Before the night was done, each of His disciples would forsake Him and flee. And yet, there He was, washing the feet of each one.

Today’s text explains why. *“[H]aving loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end”* (v. 1). Jesus loved with a perfect love those who would not love Him back. He knew how alone He would be in His suffering and death, but He loved them, and He never stopped loving them. They were among those He addressed from the cross when He said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Lk. 23:34).

He had also given them a tangible reminder of His love. They would not have His visible presence among them for much longer. So He gave them a new meal, a new testament to His love. At that final Passover meal, He took some of the unleavened bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, *“Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.”* Then He took a cup of wine, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, *“Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”* He

promised to give them His holy body and blood to eat and drink. This is how He would be with them always, even to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20).

## II

It is how He continues to be with you too. Every time you come forward to the Communion rail, Jesus stoops down to cleanse you. He is not ashamed to associate with you or assume the lowly task. He patiently applies the cleansing agent you need to be washed from every sinful spot, stain, and blemish. You are already counted as pure and righteous before God because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. But your old sinful nature still clings to you and wants to lead you away from Jesus. This is why He gives you His body and blood. Through these means, He continues to apply the forgiveness He won and to strengthen your faith to withstand the temptations of devil and world.

But what if we fail more than we are faithful? What if we are dirtied more often than cleansed? How long will the Lord stay patient? How long will He forgive? He will go only as far to keep you as He did to redeem you. And how far was that? All the way to His death. That is how far He is willing to go for you. As He would say to His disciples later that Thursday evening, *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends”* (Jn. 15:13). Jesus counts you and all sinners as His friends, which is why He laid down His life for you. You were in reality His enemy, but He counted you as a friend.

His love for you knows no bounds. He loved you even before you existed. He loved you as an embryo in your mother’s womb, as a baby, and on into each stage of your life. He loved you when you denied Him and set your mind on sinful promises and pleasures. He loved you when you doubted Him, blamed Him, cursed Him. His love for you has not changed. You are His. The way He expresses that love is to continue to speak His Word of grace and forgiveness to you. And to call you to dine at His blessed table where He through His servant offers you holy food and drink.

In this way, He also strengthens you to love one another. His example teaches you to look not for what you can get from others, but for what you can give. This is how you put His love on display to the world. You would not know love if He had not loved you. You would not be capable of godly love, if He did not produce it in you. All love that is holy, righteous, and good flows from Him, for He is love (1Jn. 4:16).

Whenever you sin and feel the guilt of an unkind or unloving attitude, return again and again to the ways that God’s love is dispensed – His Word and His Sacraments. Taste and see how far His love goes and trust His declaration of your forgiveness. Whether your death comes unexpectedly tomorrow or is a long way off in the future, you can find continuous comfort in the promise of Jesus to **Love You to the End**.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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