

29 March 2018
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“Incredible Love”

Text: John 13:1-17, 31b-35; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

They all sat there, looking at each other. Who’s the greatest, they had wondered before. Not so long before this, James and John had asked for those places at Jesus’ right and left, and the others had been indignant at them for asking.

But that was not their concern this night. Tonight they wanted to know: *who was the least?* Who would wash the feet? All twenty-six dirty, smelly, disgusting feet. Certainly not Peter! Or James or John! They were the top three. The ones Jesus separated from the others to see His transfiguration, and to go and pray with Him (even though they couldn’t stay awake!). *They* weren’t the least. And not Andrew - he was the very first to be called; so certainly it wouldn’t be him either. Maybe Simon or Thaddeus. Or what about Matthew? He was a tax collector before this, after all. That would be fitting! One of *them* should get up . . .

And then it happened. Jesus grabbed the bowl and the towel, dropped to His hands and knees, and began to do it. And immediately, the regret must have started. But they couldn’t jump up now. It was too late. They all had their chance, but they had all been too proud. They all wanted someone else to do it. And now Jesus was doing it. Failures. Again.

But Peter . . . he had a plan. Because Peter always has a plan. If he couldn’t jump up and take the bowl from Jesus, he at least wouldn’t let Jesus do it. He wouldn’t let Him wash his feet. He would object. That’s almost as good, right? Isn’t it?

So how shocking to hear Jesus’ words in reply: ***If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*** Jesus was right. Peter didn’t understand. How could this foot washing be so important?

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. That was a dagger into their proud hearts. Yes, they should have all gotten up and did it. It’s as if the Lord knew what they were thinking. Yes, they should have all washed one another’s feet. They should have all been fighting over the bowl, not waiting for someone else. But none of them did. Only Jesus.

We should not be surprised. We should not be surprised because none of us do what we should. If we had been in that room that night, which of us would have jumped up to do that? And what about everything else God has commanded us to do - how ya' doin' with that? If you're like me, the answer is: *not good*. Jesus told His disciples that night: ***love one another as I have loved you***. I can't even love my neighbor as myself! How can I love others as Jesus has loved me?

But it's not just foot washing, how Jesus showed His love. Jesus said: ***Now is the Son of Man glorified***. He said that, John records, in the previous chapter, too. And when He said it there, it was in reference to His crucifixion. That was a love and service even greater than foot washing. To lay down His life on the cross. To serve us by dying for us. There is no love greater than that. From first to last, beginning to end, Jesus loving and serving.

And because He did, you have been washed. You have been washed by His blood in Baptism, the bath that need not be repeated, that has made you clean. But this too: you are washed by His blood in the Absolution, the washing we need everyday, for the sins we do everyday, that make us dirty and unclean everyday. To be served and have our feet washed by Jesus everyday. And thus washed by Him, we ***have a share with Him***. We belong to Him. Forgiveness is the key to everything, everyday. And all people would know that those twelve are His disciples, by not just any love, but by that love, that service - the forgiveness they would give in His Name.

The forgiveness that we will also receive here, tonight, as we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord in His Supper, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. And ***as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes***. We proclaim His love. His loving service. The shedding of His blood that washes us clean from every sin.

This gift we receive every Sunday, and maybe because of that we lose sight of the wonder of it. But think of it - how unworthy are we to receive such a gift. Those twelve disciples, sitting in that room, wondering and trying to judge who was the least among them, who should serve and wash the others' feet . . . now not only have their feet washed by Jesus, but eat His Body and drink His Blood. He does not withhold this from them; He doesn't change His mind. He does what He came to do: institute the New Testament in His Blood. The old Passover is now fulfilled. He is the new Passover. The new Lamb they would eat as God brings them out of their slavery to sin and into the freedom of forgiveness.

They are not worthy. And neither are we.

We who, like the disciples, judge one another. We who wonder who is greater and who is lesser. We who doubt and deny and want to be served. But Jesus gives us this Supper not

because of who we are . . . *actually, I take that back!* He gives it to us exactly because of who we are! Because *that's* who we are. Because we are sinners in need of forgiveness. Because we need this gift. We need His life in us.

Paul warns against eating the bread or drinking the cup *in an unworthy manner*. But knowing that we're unworthy doesn't mean that we cannot receive this Supper - in fact, it means the very opposite! It means we can, and should. For when we confess our sins, when we acknowledge that we are unworthy sinners, and that we need this gift for the forgiveness of our sins and the life that we throw away in sin, that is to receive it as Jesus intended. That is to receive it in a worthy manner. Then you are exactly who Jesus gave this gift for.

Jesus told the twelve, *What I am doing you do not understand now*. How could they? What a night! And it was about to get even more confusing as they leave that room. As within hours Jesus is arrested, tried, convicted, crucified, dead, and buried.

But afterward you will understand. Jesus would teach them. The Holy Spirit would teach them. And they would not only understand, they would do it. They would love as Jesus loved them. They would forgive, they would serve, they would lay down their lives. And you, too. For Jesus is teaching you, too, and feeding you with Himself. And the Holy Spirit is teaching you and washing you clean. That with these gifts you have this love - given to you and so given by you.

So it is time. The feet have been washed. The Supper has been served. It is time for the blood to be shed. His loving service for the life of the world.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.