

9 April 2020  
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“He Loved Them to the End”

Text: John 13:1-17, 31b-35; Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

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

*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.*

*He loved them to the end.* That’s an interesting phrase John puts here in this verse. *He loved them to the end.* The end of what? His life? Why *wouldn’t* Jesus do that? Why would He stop? Why does John need to say this? What does it mean?

Well, I don’t think I ever got it until my father died last year. We always tried to take good care of him, but when he got very sick and the end seemed near, we stepped things up. *We loved him to the end.* We spent more time with him, read more Scripture, sang more hymns. We made sure someone was there with him almost all the time.

And then even after he died, we *loved him to the end.* Though we didn’t want to, we made funeral arrangements, we took care of his body, we saw to lots and lots of details. *We loved him to the end.* For the living take care of the dying.

But notice here with Jesus, something else is going on. Here, it is not the living who is taking care of the dying, but **the dying one takes care of the living!** Jesus is the one who *knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world*, that the time of His death had come, yet He is the one who is taking care of the others. Sometimes we see this with people. When the living are so stricken with grief that the dying one tries to care for them, but Jesus does so like no other. For He not only comforts and consoles His disciples, He provides for them and for us for time and for eternity.

Tonight we heard of two things, specifically. Two ways Jesus is providing for us and caring for us. First we heard Jesus institute His Supper. Food for His Church, His Christians. His Body and Blood, born of Mary, hung on the cross, and that would rise from the dead, given them to eat and to drink. The lamb that was slain in the first passover was eaten because the Lamb of God, in the true and everlasting passover, would be eaten. Food to feed us and strengthen us for our journey through life. Food to feed us with the forgiveness of sins. Food to *proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.*

And then we heard the second thing Jesus did: He washed His disciples' feet. An act not only of humility and service, but symbolizing the forgiveness they need every day. The forgiveness Jesus has come to provide. For it is not the bath of baptism that needs repeating, but the grime of everyday life that sticks to the feet, the grime of our daily sin that sticks to us and dirties us, that needs washing off. And Jesus has come to do that for us. That is why He is going to the cross, going to His death - for the forgiveness of our sins.

So this night, it seems, the tables were turned. The dying one was taking care of the living.

*Or was it?* For Jesus knew not only of His cross, but also of His resurrection. He had repeatedly told His disciples that He would die *and on the third day rise* (e.g. Matthew 20:19). Jesus had told Martha that He *is the resurrection and the life* (John 11:25). Jesus knew that as fearsome and excruciating as the cross would be, that would not be the end for Him. Jesus also knew the *death* that awaited His disciples. He told them they would be persecuted and killed (John 16:2). So in reality, though Jesus was going to the cross to die, He was the living one! And the disciples, who would not die on the cross, were *really* the dying ones. So Jesus is, in truth, doing both! He is the dying one who takes care of the living, and the living one who takes care of the dying. **The living God, in life and in death, taking care of His dying creatures.** That we might live and not die.

*Do you understand what I have done to you?* Jesus asks them. Really, *how could they?* But they would later. When they receive the Holy Spirit. He would teach them, and He would enable them to do what Jesus then commands: ***that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.***

Those seem like impossible words, for how can we possibly love one another as Jesus loved us? But when you understand what is happening this night - that while the dying one is taking care of the living, and the living one taking care of the dying - that both are true, **you can begin to see your own life a little differently, too.** That while living and dying are *physical* realities, much more are they *spiritual* realities. **The spiritual realities of baptism.** And like with Jesus, baptism turns the tables. For while physically we live and then we die, spiritually, in baptism, like Jesus and with Jesus, we die and then we live.

*So how, then, do we love one another as Jesus has loved us?* Well, by knowing that baptized into Christ, we are the ones who have died with Him and now live in Him, and so we are the living who are taking care of the dying. We are the ones who can give our lives for others because Jesus has given His life for us, and we know that resurrection awaits us. In baptism, death has lost its hold on us. In baptism, we have the forgiveness of sins we need. In baptism, the love of God and the Spirit of God are poured into us (Titus

3:4-7). All that we need, we have. In baptism, Jesus withholds nothing from us.

But as we still live in sinful flesh and a sinful world, our love will fall short. We will not love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and we will not even love our neighbor as ourself (Matthew 22:37, 39). But Jesus takes care of us with the **ongoing footwashing** we need in the absolution, and the **ongoing feeding and forgiveness** we need in His Supper. That dying, we live. And that we live and not die. That with Jesus and His gifts, we have life now and life forever.

During the days of this pandemic, there are two sad realities. **The first** is that many people are not able to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord at this time. In such circumstances we are grateful that our Lord knows our weaknesses and needs and has provided His gifts in multiple ways, so that none are without His forgiveness and life. **The second** is that many are being deprived of being able to love their loved ones to the end - they are not able to be with them in their dying days, and are even unable to see to their needs after that. This plague and death wreaking havoc in our world, as they always do.

But though they stop us, **they cannot stop Jesus**. What we are unable to do, *He is able*. ***Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*** And He's not going to stop. Wherever you are, however you are, Jesus loves you to the end. He is the dying one and the living one. He is the dying taking care of the living and the living taking care of the dying. So in life and in death, He is caring for you, providing for you, feeding you, washing you, and will see you through it all. And what we receive from Him, we now *are* and we now *give*.

Now Jesus goes to His death. He loves You to the end. Our Passover Lamb is sacrificed. Come let us eat His flesh and be saved by His blood.

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