

"It's All About Love"

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

March 24, 2005

Maundy Thursday Worship

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John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Prayer.

It begins with Love ...

Our Gospel lesson for this evening begins with the heart of our Savior. "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." (John 13:1b)

When you look back over your life, it is possible to see many people who have come and gone. Most will come for a few months or years, then one will depart. They might move on or move away, or it might be you who does the moving. Differences of opinion may drive people apart; a hurtful word, or an action that results in an awkward parting. Circumstances of life might move one away from another; marriage, having a child, taking a new job.

There are actually very few who remain constant. Some are very close to family, and make a point of never moving far away. Others are very close to others from the same church, or organization, and make it a point to never venture far.

The older we get, the more we understand just how fragile life is. Each of us are only a heartbeat from losing our soul mate, a child, a parent, or a dear friend.

It is only when we look at relationships through the lense of faith that we begin to see the world as it is meant to be seen.

Jesus loved his disciples. He loved them to the end. He loved them in spite of differences, in spite of their ignorance, in spite of their inability to understand. He loved them even though one would deny and one would betray him. He loved them even when it would be impossible for them to love themselves.

The lense of faith helps us to see the world the same way Jesus did. He loved, always, everywhere, without exception. And so should we.

Beloved Zion, take this example of our Savior, his love for his disciples, and allow it to be applied to our own lives. Love one another. Love each other the same way Jesus did. God put others into your lives for a reason- that you might love them; as a sister, as a brother, as a father, as a mother; that you might love them the way you love the Savior Himself.

Love is the focus of all that Jesus says and does ...

He shares the bread and cup on Maundy Thursday. Though not recorded in John, from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians, we are given entry to their Passover meal. It would be our Lord's final meal, truly a "Last Supper."

Our table is set this evening to give us a more realistic sense of the real food and wine involved. It was an actual supper, one eaten together with friends and fellow Jews. At the meal, they would have recalled the Exodus story, according to tradition and Jewish ordinances. The story would be recited from memory and scroll of how our God, "Yahweh" in the Hebrew, is a god of Deliverance. Yahweh delivered our ancestors out of Egyptian slavery.

God is faithful with those who live in divine covenant. We are the children of Abraham, and God watches over and cares for us. We are the sons and daughters of Zion, and our God loves us so much that we are delivered from Pharaoh and given a new home.

At this Passover table we are reminded that God continues to be a god of Deliverance. God loves His people so much that we are given a Savior, and through Him, deliverance from our sin and death.

Remember who your Savior is each time we gather. Remember who your Savior is each time we worship. Remember who your Savior is every time you break bread together. Remember who your Savior is each time you drink of His cup. Through remembrance, the bread and the cup become the manifestation of Christ's love for us.

The bread is the Body of Christ. We eat the bread; we are the Body of Christ. The bread is shared with the world; we are to share Christ's love to all the world through our missions and outreach, that the world might be transformed into God's kingdom, His body, on earth as it is in heaven.

When you eat this bread and drink this cup, may you experience the love of the Savior.

Love is the focus of all that Jesus says and does ...

He washes His disciple's feet on Maundy Thursday. Jesus assumes the role of the servant and washes his disciples' feet.

In today's world we don't value those who provide service- those who wait on our tables, those who clean our offices, those who do the ministry that we pay them to do. We value leadership. We value self-asserted ness. We value education, position, salary,

and responsibility. We value wealth and power and position in the community. When I was a student trustee on the Board of United Theological Seminary, I saw how differently each member of the Board was treated. The CEO of Hershey, Inc was pampered like a king. The Bishop of Indiana was always surrounded by people entranced by his every word. I was given a free meal and the permission to listen in, "but don't make any waves." I could read between the lines.

This evening Jesus takes a towel and a picture of water and kneels submissively at his disciples' feet and offers to wash them. He assumes the role of the lowest slave, the least of the household servants, and invites them to offer their dirty, filthy feet.

Jesus comes to Peter. You know- Peter, the Rock, the solid rock upon which Jesus is planning to build the Church. You know- Peter, the impetuous one, open mouth-insert-foot disciple, quick to tell all the world that Jesus is the Messiah – even though He had told him to be quiet. You know- Peter, quick to draw the sword and cut off the ear – even though Jesus always abhorred violence. You know- Peter, quick to warm himself around a fire, and to deny ever knowing Jesus just to save his skin.

"I love you, Peter" Jesus tells him as he washes off the dirt. "Later, you will understand," Jesus says reaching for the towel "Later, you will understand just how much I love you."

Jesus doesn't tell us to just love the servant- to appreciate or elevate the roll they serve in society. **Jesus is telling us to be the servant**, to be the one **whose motive is nothing more and nothing less than to love** those we are called to serve.

We aren't called to just feed the hungry. We are called to love the hungry, too!

We aren't called to just send our money to aid the victims of the tsunami in south Asia, we are called to love our neighbors, to love them just as passionately as we love our God and ourselves.

We aren't called to just be tolerant of other faiths and religious beliefs, we are called to love them as sisters and brothers, as well.

We aren't just called to end violence and oppression throughout the world, Jesus calls us to love our enemies; to love them until they are no longer enemies; to love them just as He loves us.

Maundy Thursday ends with words of Love ...

(John 13:34-35) ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Christianity has earned itself a bad reputation. In the eyes of many, they look upon the crusades as Christians waging war, slaughtering in the name of Christ, in a self-motivated grab for the Holy Lands. In the eyes of many, they look upon the Inquisition as Christians slaughtering our own in a battle of self-righteous power mongers. In the eyes of many, they look upon

- the Puritans burning women as witches,
- conflicts in Northern Ireland – of Protestant against Catholic,

• the Balkans – of Christian against Moslem,
and see murder in the name of righteous intolerance. In the eyes of many, they see Christians engaged in a war against Islam. In the eyes of many, Christians are seen as dividing

- in the Roman Church, American Catholics walking away from Rome,
- in the Protestant Church, independent churches leaving the mainline denominations, the Religious Right making a self-righteous stand against the moderates and Liberal Left,

Let's face it, Christianity has a well deserved reputation for division and discord.

This stands in utter contrast from the command of Jesus at the conclusion of the Last Supper: to love- To love one another with the same depth of commitment and relationship as Jesus loves us- To love one another with the same capacity, the same ability as Jesus- **so that all others will know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.**

To an outsider looking in, would they see that we love one another, that we love the Lord our God, such that they would know that we are disciples of Jesus?

Jesus establishes a pretty high standard for Christian conduct. We are commanded to love with such completeness that others will know that we are disciples of Jesus. This completeness is patterned after the love that Jesus has for us. He loved us so much that he died to deliver us from our sin. He loved us so much that he rose from the dead to deliver us from the grave and into eternal life.

On the Maundy Thursday evening we are being asked to recommit ourselves to this higher standard of love. Jesus is commanding us to love, so let us resolve to be wholly dedicated to this task.

Maundy Thursday begins with love, loving his disciples until the end. Maundy Thursday is all about the love Christ has for us, as manifest in the gifts of bread and wine. Maundy Thursday is a time to experience the depth of love when it is given the role of a servant, washing the feet of others. Maundy Thursday ends, with one of Jesus' rare commands, to love with such completeness that all the world will know by our love that we are His disciples.

It is all about love, dearly beloved members and friends of Zion.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.

