

St. David's, Maundy Thursday, 3/28/2024 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Maundy Thursday services tend to be dominated by foot-washings, an important part of our legacy from Jesus, reminding us to love one another as he loved us and to serve one another. Washing feet was a humbling act of a servant, but Jesus embraced it. Following his example, none of us should consider ourselves to be above others. Or to be above certain jobs. I have plunged many toilets in the course of seventeen years of ordained ministry, for example, and it never feels glamorous. Sometimes I think, for this I went to seminary? And other times I think, yes, this is why I went to seminary. To serve other people.

Several verses are omitted from tonight's Gospel of John reading, and I can never resist looking at what's left out. In those verses we didn't hear tonight, Jesus talks about his impending betrayal and identifies Judas as the one who will betray him. I'm not sure why we don't read those verses on Maundy Thursday, because they show us that Judas was present and that when Jesus washed feet, he knowingly washed the feet of the man who was about to betray him.

Can you imagine? Jesus did not just wash the feet of his loyal disciples, but knowingly washed the feet of his betrayer.

I am unable to participate in the footwashing this year, due to being immunocompromised and having dozens of small cuts on my fingers and feet. I have mixed feelings about not being able to participate. I have always found footwashing a deeply uncomfortable practice, but unquestionably holy.

Holiness, in my experience, is rarely comfortable. I remember the first set of feet I ever washed. They belonged to Susan, the rector of the church where I served as a seminary intern. I admired Susan so much. I perceived her as powerful, so was struck by how vulnerable her bare feet looked. Susan wasn't one to go get a pedicure before Maundy Thursday. Her feet weren't fancy on any level. Handling her feet felt sacred. And embarrassing. Definitely holy.

Sometimes this act of washing feet means we overlook another crucial aspect of Maundy Thursday: that is, the Last Supper, from which we get our sacrament of Eucharist. John's gospel focuses on the footwashing, not the bread and the wine, but we still hear about the bread and wine in tonight's first Corinthians reading. Notice how the role of betrayal is again emphasized in this reading, as it is in our eucharistic prayers: "In the night in which he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body that is for you."

Jesus not only washed the feet of his beloved betrayer, but he also shared the bread and wine with him. His body and blood. The sacrament. Jesus cared for Judas, even knowing what he was about to do.

Who have you cared for in the loving, gentle way that Jesus cared for Judas?

Even though I am not able to participate in the foot washing this year, I know that observing it will be just as holy of an experience. I am always moved watching you care for one another. I've been particularly struck in the past watching the way Carol washes someone else's feet, as she does it with such love and humility. And I have been moved watching someone whom I know is mad at someone else wash their feet or allow their own feet to be washed. I've been moved by seeing children wash their parents' feet or parents wash their children's feet.

Tonight I hope we will bring the same reverence and mystery to our celebration of the Eucharist, remembering that very first one, which must have been so strange: Jesus blessing and sharing bread and wine and then giving it new meaning. This must have confused his disciples, the way the him bending down to wash their feet did. Holiness can be so confusing, can't it? In the Episcopal church we typically only wash feet once a year, but we can share communion weekly or even more often. The one time that we will not celebrate communion, at least here, is on Good Friday. Tonight when we strip the altar, I will remove the reserved sacrament from the ambry, and turn off the light that signifies its presence. That light will remain off until Easter morning, when we consecrate new elements for the ambry and place them inside. Those are always powerful moments in the liturgy.

Tonight marks the first night of the Triduum, the three days preceding Easter. Tomorrow, Good Friday, we will observe the cross, and on Holy Saturday we will observe the grave. Tonight, we remember the way Jesus washed the feet of his loved ones and fed them, right before his arrest. After the service, Travis will sit in front of the stripped altar, remembering Jesus' plea "Will you wait with me one hour?" You are invited to join her as you feel led.