

Maundy Thursday Service, April 9, 2020
John 13:1-17, 34-35
(Dramatic monologue of Peter,
by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe)
“This Is Our Time to Love and Serve!”



We were so excited! On Sunday, crowds of people lined the streets and cheered for Jesus as He rode a donkey into Jerusalem. They laid their coats and cloaks on the ground before Him and waved palm branches in the air shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” We truly believed that He was our long-awaited Messiah who would come and set us free! It wouldn’t be long now till Jesus would usher in His kingdom—and we couldn’t wait!

Our excitement continued throughout the week, especially as we looked forward to celebrating the Passover feast—a time when we remembered and celebrated how God spared our ancestors during the plague of death while they were slaves in Egypt. (We hoped and prayed that God would soon set us free from the plague of death by the Romans.) Every year, we looked forward to celebrating the Passover Feast with our families. Since we were Jesus’ disciples and following Him everywhere, we would celebrate it with him this year. John and I (Simon Peter) were honored when Jesus asked us to prepare the meal. We found an upper room where we could gather. We bought and prepared the food—and it smelled wonderful! This would be a meal we would never forget! We got everything ready, including the pitcher of water, bowl, and towel for washing feet. In our culture, a servant washed the feet of everyone entering a home. Our feet got very dirty walking in sandals on the dusty roads, and sometimes stepping in what the

animals left behind. Therefore, it was a dirty, smelly job to wash people's feet; it was a job no one fought over.

When Jesus and the other disciples arrived, we all gathered around the table and began enjoying the meal together. Then Jesus did something I never expected... At first, I thought it was very out of character, but then later I realized, it revealed His true character, His true heart.

While we finished our meal, Jesus got up, took off His outer cloak, and walked over to the pitcher of water, towel, and basin. As He wrapped the towel around His waist, I froze... I knew what Jesus was doing..., and I knew what I hadn't done... Jesus was getting ready to wash our feet... because John and I hadn't. Since we prepared the meal and we didn't have any servants in this borrowed room, we should have washed everyone's feet..., but we didn't. Maybe in the excitement of it all, we just forgot...? Or maybe, in our pride, we thought it was beneath us...

Regardless of why I didn't do it, I was embarrassed and humiliated that Jesus was going to wash our feet! He is the Messiah, the Son of God! He should never have to wash anyone's feet! And yet, that's exactly what He chose to do... As I watched Him pour water over each disciples' feet, and then wash and dry them, I felt more and more ashamed and unworthy. When Jesus came around the table to me, I asked Him, "Lord, are *you* going to wash *my* feet?" Jesus responded, "You don't realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." How could I understand this? He is the Messiah! I was the one who should have been washing His feet... but I didn't because I failed... I messed up... I wasn't worthy... And so I refused... "No," I said, "you will *never* wash my feet." Jesus lovingly answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

Have no part with Jesus? I couldn't bear the thought! I blurted out, "Then, Lord, not just my feet—but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "If a person has had a bath, he only *needs to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean*, though not every one of you." We didn't know it then, but He was talking about Judas... who would betray Him.

As Jesus knelt before me, I knew I should have been the one kneeling before Him! As Jesus poured the water over my feet, it felt as if God's love was washing over me... and washing me clean... As Jesus took the towel from around His waist and dried my feet, I felt the warmth of God's love envelope me. I was stunned... into silence... Jesus, the Son of God, just washed *my* feet...!? I'd never seen such an act of humility or love... How could I ever repay Jesus for His overwhelming love? I was about to find out.

When Jesus finished washing our feet, he put on His outer cloak and returned to His place at the table. Then He asked us, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should

wash one another's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do to others as I have done to you. "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

At first, I was confused... How was it a new command to love one another? God commanded that long ago—in the book you call Leviticus. Over the next few days, I began to realize what Jesus meant. Jesus didn't just say to "love one another," He said to "love one another as I have loved you." How had Jesus loved us? Jesus humbled Himself and became a servant when He washed our feet. The next day, Jesus humbled Himself even more when He willingly died on the Cross for your sins and my sins and the sins of the world—so we could be forgiven of our sins and restored in our relationship with God. That's what was new; Jesus was calling us to love one another humbly and sacrificially, as a servant.

How had I loved others unconditionally or served them sacrificially? I hadn't... I had argued with the other disciples over who was the greatest... Later that night, even though Jesus warned me, three times I denied that I even knew Jesus, my teacher, my Lord, and my friend! I was ashamed and humiliated! Although I didn't deserve it, He forgave me and loved me unconditionally—the same way He loves you! You may be thinking (like I did), that you're not worthy! And you're right—you're not. None of us is! But that's the point! God's unconditional love is His *gift* to everyone—if we will accept it.

When we accept Jesus' love and the gift of new life He offers, He changes us! I know, because He certainly changed me! After Jesus rose from the dead and I was filled with the Holy Spirit, God transformed me. Instead of denying that I knew Jesus, He helped me boldly tell others about Him! Instead of running away, I ran to tell people the good news of Jesus! Instead of fearing for my life, I trusted Jesus would take care of me; even if I died in this world, I knew I would live with Him forever in His kingdom! Jesus helped me to love others the way He did—and I risked and gave my life for them.

Will you? Have you accepted the gift of love and everlasting life He's offered you? Have you let Jesus wash you clean of your sins and envelope you in His love? Have you let Jesus serve you and wash your feet?

You know, it wasn't until later that I realized... no one washed Jesus' feet. All of us should have been washing Jesus' feet, but He washed ours instead. Now it's our turn to wash Jesus' feet. How? Jesus once said, "Whatever you do to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you do to Me." We may not be able to physically wash Jesus' feet, but we can serve Him by serving others...

How will you serve and wash other people's feet? In your day and time, you don't need to physically wash people's feet like we did, but you certainly have other ways to humbly serve them. Could you call people to

check on them—to make sure they're ok and have everything they need, and if not, get it for them? Could you spend time on your knees in prayer—praying for the world, its' leaders, and all who are hurting and suffering? Could you “pay it forward” somehow—by paying for a person's order behind you in the drive-through or check-out line? Could you call someone who's depressed or discouraged to remind them they are not alone, and then share with them the love, hope, and joy of Jesus? Could you find new ways to humbly serve your family and neighbors? How will you serve? How will you sacrifice your life for others?

Jesus said the world will know we are His disciples by our love for *each other*—not our love for Him, but our love for each other! Every time you give of yourself and love others sacrificially as Jesus loved us, the world sees Jesus in you! My friends, in the difficult and challenging times you are facing, people need to see Jesus now more than ever! I can relate.

In those early years after Jesus died and rose from the dead, sometimes we couldn't buy, sell, or trade with others to get the groceries we needed—because some wouldn't associate with us because we followed Jesus. We risked our lives just by going out and telling others about Jesus. Sometimes we couldn't gather for worship without fear of persecution or death. But we would not let our fears overtake us. We trusted that the One who overcame sin and death could help us overcome anything we faced in this world... and He will help you, too!

The world needs Jesus now more than ever! People need to know the love, hope, and joy of Jesus in this dark and troubled world! So, embrace the troubles you face; claim them as great opportunities to show Jesus' love to people in ways you never could before! If you do, Jesus will greatly bless you... and many others through you! When you love and serve others, they will see and hopefully get to know the Jesus in you. Then Jesus can set them free and bring His kingdom into this world through you! My friends, this not a time to sulk about the situations we face. This is our time to shine! This is our time to show God's love! This is our time to serve! Will you?