

**Sermon Preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity
Rittenhouse Square
April 5, 2007 (Maundy Thursday)
by the Reverend Meg Buerkel
“Love One Another”**

In the Name of Jesus: The One who loves and serves and saves.
Amen.

In today's Old Testament lesson from Exodus we heard the Passover story – story of God's power and might in saving the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. This is the story that our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate this week.

The Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) say the Last Supper happened during the Passover celebration. Not so with John – the gospel story we've just heard – here, the Last Supper happens 'before the festival of the Passover' – everyone was preparing for it; the crowds were gathering in Jerusalem, there was excitement in the air... Johannine scholars therefore think that, the Last Supper took place on Tuesday night.

That Tuesday night – Jesus gathers his disciples together, the people who have journeyed miles and miles with him... Those disciples who tasted water turned to wine. Those disciples who saw Lazarus emerge from his tomb. Those disciples who heard the blind say, "I have sight!" Those disciples who experienced the radical inclusiveness of Jesus ministry: All were welcome – the sick, the lame, women, men, children, tax collectors, even Gentiles. All were welcomed in Jesus' ministry.

That Tuesday night – Does Jesus know it's his last? He can feel the tension in the air. He knows the authorities saw the crowds welcome him with palm branches. He knows they saw him overturn the tables in the Temple. He knows they don't approve of his teaching. Maybe Jesus knows that this Tuesday is his last.

Now a question for all of us... What would you do if it were your last night alive? I would want to gather with the people I love. I would want to tell them what they've meant to me. How about you?

Jesus is no different: he gathers with his friends. They share a meal – Paul tells us he broke bread and drank wine with them, calling the bread his body, the wine his blood. And Jesus talks with them... And then the really weird stuff starts happening: the One who led the Israelites out of Egypt with power and might, the One who changed water to wine, the One who walked on water, this great and powerful One, well, He begins to serve them. He bends over, cups their feet in his hands and washes them.

I find it interesting that the first – the wine and the bread – is now a sacrament of the church – gathering for Holy Eucharist – why not the second? I wonder where we be today if washing were a sacrament??

A bit of background: Jesus and his disciples probably dined in the Roman manner, that is, reclining with their feet on couches. They probably were not seated at a table with their feet under the table, they were likely lounging around, with their feet on the couches. And feet would pick up all kinds of dust and dirt from the road – the roads of Jerusalem were dirty and dusty. And it was typically the lowest servant's role to wash feet.

John tells us that Jesus got up DURING supper and washed feet. Everyone's feet were washed. Jesus took off his outer robe, tied a towel around his waist, and washed everyone's feet.

He didn't say,
Mark, your feet are too smelly to wash.
John, your feet don't fit in my basin, so I'm skipping you.
Oh my, Phillip, you haven't had a pedicure in ages, your corns are too disgusting to touch.
Judas, you will hurt me, I will not wash your feet.

Everyone's feet were washed by their Lord and Teacher. Their Lord and Teacher fulfilled the role of servant at this supper.

William Temple has said, "Our humility shows itself first in the readiness to receive service from our fellow humans and supremely from God. To accept service from others is to acknowledge a measure of dependence on them." (Readings in John's Gospel, 204)

We are dependent on God. We are dependent upon each other. God serves us all – God loves us all. We must accept this gift, remember this action, and model our lives on it.

And then he says something that is not printed in your bulletins, Jesus says, “Little children, I am with you only a little longer. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

As we are served and loved by our Lord and Savior,
so must we serve and love those in our midst,
even the ones with the big or smelly feet,
even the ones who are ungrateful,
even the ones from whom we will never receive thanks,
even the ones we are certain will hurt us.

Our Lord and Teacher calls us to love one another – and to show this love in serving one another. AMEN.

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