

### **EXODUS 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14**

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,

2 “This month will be the first month; it will be the first month of the year for you.

3 Tell the whole Israelite community: On the tenth day of this month they must take a lamb for each household, a lamb per house.

4 If a household is too small for a lamb, it should share one with a neighbor nearby. You should divide the lamb in proportion to the number of people who will be eating it.

[5 Your lamb should be a flawless year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 You should keep close watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month. At twilight on that day, the whole assembled Israelite community should slaughter their lambs.

7 They should take some of the blood and smear it on the two doorposts and on the beam over the door of the houses in which they are eating.

8 That same night they should eat the meat roasted over the fire. They should eat it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

9 Don't eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over fire with its head, legs, and internal organs.

10 Don't let any of it remain until morning, and burn any of it left over in the morning.]

11 This is how you should eat it. You should be dressed, with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. You should eat the meal in a hurry. It is the Passover of the LORD.

12 I'll pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I'll strike down every oldest child in the land of Egypt, both humans and animals. I'll impose judgments on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.

13 The blood will be your sign on the houses where you live. Whenever I see the blood, I'll pass over you. No plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14 “This day will be a day of remembering for you. You will observe it as a festival to the LORD. You will observe it in every generation as a regulation for all time.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26**

23 I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread.

24 After giving thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.”

25 He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me.”

26 Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes.

### **JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35**

Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.

2 Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus.

3 Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God

and was returning to God.

4 So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist.

5 Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing.

6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later."

8 "No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me."

9 Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!"

10 Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." 11 He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean."

12 After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you?"

13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am.

14 If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet.

15 I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do.

16 I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them.

17 Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

31 "Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.

32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately.

33 Little children, I'm with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now—'Where I'm going, you can't come.'

34 "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other.

35 This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

## **Sermon**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer:  
Amen.

O Lord, I appreciate the salvation, but do you really have to touch my feet? Some version of that statement is perhaps the most frequent reaction I've heard in response to the footwashing portion of Maundy Thursday worship. Like Peter, we're baffled by this invitation. Why would the Lord wash our feet? Why does Jesus want to wash away the grime and, as my mother mother would say, the toe jam? And why would we wash one another's feet? It's incredibly odd, and rare, and radical. Odd? Rare? Radical? Actually, that fits Jesus to a "T," or perhaps, a "J."

Now, let me make a few things very clear. First, I'm not forcing anyone to let me wash their feet. I've been a part of worship in some traditions where everyone was expected to have

their feet washed and to wash someone else's feet, but instead, I've asked for volunteers from a cross segment of the congregation, and I'm thankful for those who've said yes. But not because I like feet. Let's be clear on that as well. I hate feet. I don't like my feet. I don't like other people's feet. I don't like my feet. I don't care how well manicured they are or how recently they've been washed. But just imagine how much more difficult it would be for Jesus to wash the feet of the disciples. They've been wandering all over Judea, Samaria, and Galilee with him for something like three years. I'm sure they've washed their feet at some point throughout their journeys, but let's also remember that these are dusty, sandy, sweaty feet that only wore sandals and not shoes. Whatever the animals left on the trails? Whatever puddles were filled with whatever liquids that were dumped out of windows? Whatever people left on the roads ended up on your feet. And that's what Jesus kneels down to wash.

It's essential to remember, though, that as a pastor washes the feet of congregants, that doesn't mean the pastor is more like Jesus or holier than the rest of us gather here. That's the furthest thing from the truth or the intent of the message. Instead, as you've heard me say before, I'm not going to ask you to do anything I wouldn't do, and Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything he's not willing to do. Jesus says, "Just as I've done, so you must also do." Jesus washed feet because he wanted us to wash feet. I wash feet because I want you to wash feet, but I'm not going to force you to wash feet. It's leading by example.

But more than that, it's equipping the church with a clear image of humility. You see, in the 1st century, the person who washed feet when Israelites entered a room was the least important on the social ladder, whether an actual slave, or the poorest of free people, perhaps one of the the women among men. To wash someone else's feet was to lower yourself and

elevate that person, both physically and relationally. It was a sign of humility, of doing a dirty job so that someone else might find relief, that they might be restored to their original state of cleanliness before they embarked upon the cruddy, sinful paths of life. Before Jesus acts out the fullest image of humility in the cross, Jesus opens to his disciples - opens to us - a humility we can live in daily life. We can wash others' feet.

But, perhaps most of all, Jesus identifies himself with these people, with the foot washers. Jesus makes holy the work and the lives of those who society overlooks, both the jobs that society deems too dirty to do and the people who are unimportant enough to do them. Jesus says that there's no one low enough that he's not willing to save, there's no one dirty enough that he won't cleanse.

There's many dirty jobs that we now tend to pay others to do. Change oil in our cars. Take away our garbage. At least we tend to

pay minimum wage for those jobs, though we rarely take enough time to learn their names or thank them for their work. When Jesus washes the disciples' feet, he also washes the feet of the garbage collectors and the car mechanics, making holy both the work that is done and the people that perform the work.

Then there's the jobs that only undocumented workers will do, where they're paid less than minimum wage for jobs like picking our fruits and vegetables or simple labor for construction and landscaping. We pay them less and keep them almost always out of sight, and all too often, out of mind. When Jesus washes the disciples' feet, he also washes the feet of the undocumented migrants, telling us that these people belong, not only because the work that they do is holy, but because they are people made in the image of a God who washes our feet. Jesus bends down to wash feet so that we'll see the people we otherwise would refuse to look at.

But even beyond these people, there are those in our lives that we expect to do things that we don't want to do and that we refuse to pay. The people that we shame to perform certain tasks right in front of us, so we can see in their eyes that we've knocked them down a peg as we've raised ourselves up. These are the unpaid interns among us, who we pay in experience and exploit for their labor. These are the coworkers who we manipulate to do our work and then take credit for it in front of our superiors. When Jesus washes feet, he reminds us that every time we shame someone into doing tasks without compensation, any time we exploit someone's desperation, then we exploit, we shame, the Lord.

When he washes their feet, Jesus makes holy the most humble of places in the world, makes holy the people that inhabit those humble places, and calls us to inhabit those places as well. While we don't live in the same society as Jesus, nor the same



environment, there's still good reason to wash feet. Of course most of our feet protected by shoes and socks, and there's no longer this expectation built in that you should wash your feet as soon as you enter someone's home, and we don't expect other people to wash our feet (usually), unless you're paying for a pedicure, I suppose. So why do we still do it now? Well, that's why we do it in the liturgy rather than on a Tuesday in the office. What we're doing here is a symbol of a lifestyle, a sign of the kind of Christ that gives name to Christians. The hard work is now translating footwashing into our 21st century daily lives. That's the point. We're each called to be footwashers in this world, to lower ourselves and bless others, so that they might raise up and find the dignity that God's given to them, even if no one else in the world will recognize that dignity.

But that hard work is left for another day. Tonight, we focus not in the work that we do, but in the work that God does. We

don't become more humble by wanting to, or just by trying really hard. Our pride is transformed by the humility of Christ. Our focus tonight belongs on our Lord, who makes holy the most unlikely of people: the footwashers. The garbage collectors. The mechanics. The unpaid interns. The undocumented migrants. When Jesus transforms the world, he doesn't just do the respectable things, the legal things. Jesus broke the law, became a servant, and washed the nasty feet of the people he loved. He turned their expectations upside down to turn their world upside down.

Rather than let sin rule our world, Jesus rebuilt our lives from the ground up, from the feet up. So, yes, tonight we'll wash some feet, but only because it points us to the great footwasher, the one who makes the most unlikely people holy. Even the footwashers, the garbage collectors, the interns, the immigrants, and, as we see in this last of suppers on earth, even you and even me. Amen.