

Maundy Thursday

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[0:00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

! Please be seated. I invite you to open your Bibles to John 13.

I believe it's on page 1069 of your pew Bible. If you're using a pew Bible. Now before the feast of the Passover.

That's the setting. Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

I want us to see the cross this evening as the controlling theme of all that is taking place.

[1:10] We must not turn the event of this holy night into mere sentimentalism. This is not merely an example of humility or lesson in kindness, though it is that, but it's more than that.

It is the beginning, actually, of our Lord's passion. By the way, when we speak of our Lord's passion, we mean a suffering. It's atoning death and trial, suffering, wrongly accused, and then crucifixion.

This is the beginning of it. His hour had come, John tells us. His hour to depart from this world. And everything now is moving towards the cross.

The narrative has been building in John's Gospel, actually. Since the raising of Lazarus, that prefigurement of life from death, that foreshadowing.

Since then, death has followed our Lord. Because the intensifying plot to kill him, the plot to kill him has intensified. And now, we have before us, in this text this evening, an enacted parable that would prefigure and pre-shadow the passion itself that he's about to embark on.

[2:32] And the setting in which this story takes place makes this significance unmistakable for all of us. We're told that it's before the feast of the Passover.

Passover. A lamb slain. Blood shed. Judgment averted. We read that in the Exodus reading.

Passover. So when Jesus rises from supper and lays aside his garments and takes a towel, he's not stepping away from the cross.

In fact, he is stepping closer to it. And he's revealing the cross for us in this very enacted parable that he shows for his disciples and he shows us.

He poured water into a basin, we're told, and began to wash the disciples' feet. Now, you may have heard this story before, and you've been told about that this isn't, there will be a foot washing today.

[3:39] I can assure you that none of your feet, if you may be, you may be self-conscious, and you may not want to come because you think your feet is dirty or stinky. But I can assure you, none of your feet, whoever may have the stinkiest one here this evening, is not as bad or as horrible or as odious as any of these disciples' feet.

Not because they're dirty men, but it's because of the nature of the climate they walked in. They were wearing sandals. Most of you probably came with closed-door shoes because of that weather. They were wearing sandals on dirt roads with animal feces and all sorts of things on those roads. This very act of washing feet is beneath even a servant, a slave. It is the job of a slave. And perhaps it's even a job for a Gentile slave so that you don't even send an Israelite, a Jewish man or woman to do this menial task.

But our Lord stooped down to wash his disciples' feet. And this is not just about dirt. In Scripture, washing is actually about sin.

Remember the psalmist when he cries out in Psalm 51, Wash me thoroughly. Remember Isaiah 1, it talks about, Though your sins are scarlet, they shall be white.

[5:17] Be washed and be made white as snow. Remember the Day of Atonement itself, which is a cleansing through sacrifice.

And all of this is coming together. So this act of our Lord is a sign, a visible proclamation. Jesus is showing our sinners are cleansed.

Sinners are cleansed not by their own effort, not by ritual observances. Sinners are cleansed by him, by his own self-giving, by the passion he's about to endure on the cross.

The foot washing is an enacted parable of this humble king who lays down his life to redeem his people. And we are first invited, brothers and sisters, to turn to him and believe in him before we are then invited to follow his example.

And so two lessons for us in this reading. First lesson is that no one is qualified. Perhaps the key point of this story, as Jesus began to wash his disciples' feet, is the interaction that takes place between St. Peter and the Lord in verses 6 to 8.

[6:45] Peter said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? And Jesus answered him, What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.

Peter is seeing this as a literal act. Jesus is speaking metaphorically, symbolically, deeper than just the act of just merely washing their feet.

And Peter doesn't understand. It's true that Peter doesn't understand, but he will understand. But Peter proclaimed, You shall never wash my feet. Now, it sounds reverent from Peter's perspective. You may even think, why didn't the rest of the disciples say the same thing? After all, this act is beneath a king. And that is who he is. He's a king.

But perhaps it's not just reverence from Peter's perspective that's making him say, You shall never wash my feet. Perhaps it's also pride on Peter's part. That led Peter to resistance. Maybe you may identify with this.

[7:56] Because the pride here reflects a feeling of self-sufficiency. Or spiritual pride. Or a misunderstanding of grace.

Peter still thinks in terms of worthiness. But Jesus answers with absolute clarity. Unless I wash you, You have no part in me.

No part. No share. No belonging. Unless I wash you. Here's the deeper principle.

No one can belong to Christ. No one. Without being cleansed by him. No one. Not experience.

You may say, I have a lot of experience in the church. Not competence. I do a lot. I do a lot right here. Not ministry history.

[8:54] Do you know how long I've been serving? In the household of God? None of these things grants you a share. Or belonging in him.

Unless you've first been cleansed by him. Nothing qualifies you. Nothing in you qualifies you before God.

And this is echoing what Jesus says elsewhere in John chapter 15 verse 5. Apart from me, you can do nothing. And this is the great barrier, I think, to salvation.

This great barrier to salvation is not just, it's not just our sin alone. It is the refusal that often comes because of our own self-pride, self-filling of self-sufficiency, that we don't want to be served by Christ.

That we think that we can bring something to the table. We insist sometimes that we can stand on our own before God.

[10:01] But the gospel says to us, you must be washed. You must be washed. Without it, you have no belonging, and no share, and no part in Christ.

The second lesson is that everyone who is washed is clean. Simon Peter swings to the opposite extreme when Jesus says, you have no part in me if you're not washed.

He swings to the opposite extreme, and he says, then Lord, not just my feet, but wash my hands and my head as well. And here Jesus gives a defining distinction. The one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but he's already completely clean.

There are two realities in what Jesus just said to Simon Peter. One bath is what's needed for full cleansing. This is the once for all bath that Christ gives to all who comes to him by faith as he justifies us.

Though we are sinful, we are unworthy, because of his shed blood and his atoning blood on the cross, he has made us worthy.

[11:27] He's justified us, completely forgives us of our sins, forgiven us of our sins, totally cleansed us from all our unrighteousness, united us in him.

with God. This is the reality of this one cleansing that is needed by faith, of which baptism signifies. There is one baptism that is needed and it is sufficient.

You are clean if you come to him by faith in Christ Jesus. You are clean. So what is then this foot washing that goes on? Jesus says, you've already bathed.

You've bathed in the waters of baptism. You've been made clean by faith in him. You've been buried with Christ. You've been raised to new life. All that you need is your feet to be washed. This ongoing cleansing is what Jesus says. But those who are clean still work, because it's the reality that those who are clean still walk through a fallen world.

[12:33] we know that even after baptism we still sin. We still stumble. We still need cleansing.

But this cleansing now is not from condemnation because St. Paul reminds us there is now no condemnation for those who are what?

In Christ Jesus. And you are in Christ. and he's taken all your guilt and shame upon himself on the cross and he's covered you in his righteousness.

But you still need ongoing cleansing. You need cleansing from defilement. But here's the truth of the matter that Peter, that our Lord wants Peter to see.

He doesn't grasp it yet but he will grasp it and he wants us to grasp it. The cross of Christ. That act, that passion he's about to enter into the cross of Christ and his death and his work on the cross is sufficient.

[13:43] It's sufficient for your past and your present and your future. You do not restart your salvation each time you sin. God doesn't cancel his forgiveness of you.

You do not return to the beginning each time you stumble. All you have to do when you sin and when you stumble is do what? Return to Christ.

Return to him for daily cleansing. Confess your sins. Hear the comfortable words of the Lord Jesus Christ who says to you, come to me all who are weary and edulating and I will give you rest.

He wants to give you rest. Come to him. When you stumble, go to him for daily cleansing. When you sin, confess your sins which brings cleansing and hear his words of comfort and forgiveness. But to do this continually which is the life of a believer. We don't just confess our sins once. We continually confess our sins. The life of the believer is a life for continual repentance.

[14:56] But this reality is very humbling. It's deeply humbling because you contribute. It reminds you again and again that you contribute nothing.

You rest solely on the finished work of Christ on the cross. That's why it's deeply humbling. But it's also, brothers and sisters, deeply liberating.

I hope you see that because Christ has done everything. That's what this says. Christ has done all that is necessary for you to have peace with God.

And so, you go to him for ongoing cleansing. The cross is not only what saves you once, it is what sustains you always.

Every day in this earthly pilgrimage, as sin clings to you, as your conscience is burdened, as fellowship is strained, what do you need in the midst of it all?

[16:00] You don't need a new sacrifice, but you just need a fresh application of the same sufficient sacrifice of Christ on the cross. You need Christ to come to you again and again, to wash your feet.

And this is why this night matters. Because on this same night that Christ washes disciples' feet, he gives them the supper, the bread, and the wine, the cup.

And these interpret the foot washing. The foot washing shows what Christ, what the cross accomplishes. the supper shows how that cleansing is continually applied to those who are in Christ.

When you come to the table of the Lord, you're not coming to be justified again. You're coming because you're already clean. And yet, you still are in need of washing.

The supper is not the bath. It is the foot washing. Here, Christ serves his people again. He comes to you weary, evilating, encumbered with guilt and sin.

[17:25] Christ comes to you and he gives you his grace. He applies his finished work to your present need.

And this is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians, remembrance, the cup of blessing that we drink, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? This is not an empty remembrance, brothers and sisters. It is a real communion. It's not empty symbolism. It is a real communion. Christ gives himself to his people when you come to his table.

And in receiving him, you receive the benefits of his death. what are those benefits? You're redeemed, forgiven. Your slate has been wiped clean.

You're reminded of a Lord, a God who loves you, who went to the cross for you, and who would never leave you or forsake you.

[18:29] You receive the benefits of his death when you come to the table. Your conscience is cleansed. your faith is strengthened. Do you need your faith to be strengthened?

We all do. And just as he knelt before the disciples, so he comes even now to minister to his church. This is why we examine ourselves before we come.

We don't examine ourselves to stay away. We don't examine ourselves and say, well, I was not perfect this week. I am not worthy to come. Because I sinned there and there and there.

I was short-tempered with my wife. I yelled at my kids. That guy would cut me off the other day. I can't come to the table. That's not what examination means here when Paul says examine yourself. He says examine yourself. Know that you've done all of those things or maybe more that I've just listed. But then look to the cross. Because you don't come based on your self-sufficiency in the first place.

[19:36] Examine yourselves. Not to stay away, but to come rightly. We come aware of our sin. We come honest in repentance.

We come dependent upon his grace. And Christ meets us every time we come. Not with rejection, but with mercy.

With a basin and a towel to wash us, to strengthen us, to remind us of his love for us. And the hardest lesson here is receiving, knowing that we must receive that grace before we can give it.

This is the hardest lesson. We're often willing to serve, but we resist being served. We want to earn we want to feel like we earned.

We want to prove ourselves. We want to stand independently on our own two feet. That's the American way after all. But Jesus insists, you must let me wash you.

[20:44] You cannot pray without his help. You cannot grow without his work of the Holy Spirit. You cannot serve without his grace. Apart from him, you can do nothing.

everything begins with first receiving from Christ. And then we have this command. After we've come and received, we have this command to also do likewise.

Jesus says, you also ought to wash one another's feet. Now that order matters. First, be washed. Receive his love.

be reminded of his grace. And then go and serve in like manner. With humility, with self-giving love. The church is a community of the washed.

Humble together, forgiven together, sustained together. And at the table, this becomes visible. As we come, we kneel side by side.

[21:50] We don't have kneelers in this church. Maybe in the future we will do have that. We come, we kneel in our hearts, not as those worthy in our own right, but as those made worthy by his atoning blood.

That's how we come. That's who we are. People were washed, that were being cleansed. Sinners who've been saved, who've been sanctified by the precious blood of Christ.

Christ. And having loved his own, John tells us, he loved them to the end, to the uttermost, to the cross, to the basin, to the table.

Tonight, Christ still loves his people this way. He still stoops, he still serves, he still cleanses. So, come.

not because you're worthy, but because you need to be washed. Come to the one who loved you to the end. Come in faith and let him cleanse you from sin.

[23:00] And if you receive this cleansing, and you're already his own, you've been bathed, then come even tonight to the table of the Lord, fully aware of your need for his ongoing grace to keep you and to sustain you.

to the end. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.