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John 13:1-17, 31b-35  
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On this Maundy Thursday -

- as we gather around tables,
- in sanctuaries,
- on screens,
- to remember the night in which Jesus was betrayed -
- and his last meal with his disciples -
- You might find yourself wondering, -
- ‘Why isn’t there bread or wine in our reading from the Gospel of John?’ - -
- after all -
- this is the night when Jesus commanded his disciples,
- commanded us -
- to share in the bread and the wine -
- and to do this in remembrance of me, - -
- Well interestingly enough, -
- the Gospel of John -
- doesn’t include -
- that part of the meal -
- doesn’t include what we now call the words of institution -
- in recounting the events of that evening.

- Instead, -

- the Gospel of John focuses on a different moment of that evening

- the moment when Jesus got up from the table -

- took off his outer robe,

- tied a towel around his waist -

- and began to wash the feet of the disciples. - -

The Gospel of John focuses on

- the moment -

- when Jesus, - -

- the disciples' friend,

- their teacher,

- and their leader, - -

- began to undertake -

- a job reserved for the lowest of servants - - -

- washing the feet of those who had followed him -

- out of fishing boats,

- across rough and dusty roads,

- through far flung towns -

- and now into Jerusalem. -

- To say that the disciples were surprised -

- is probably a bit of an understatement. - -

- Peter certainly wasn't comfortable with the idea - -

- “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” (John 13:6)

- was Peter’s hesitant response. -

- and when it became clear that Jesus -

- was going to wash his feet - -

- Peter pushed back -

- “You will never wash my feet” (John 13:8) - -

- Peter -

- like so many of us -

- just isn’t comfortable with the idea of having his feet washed -

- by someone else. - -

- Peter

- just isn’t comfortable with the idea of his teacher,

- his leader,

- his Lord - -

- smelling, touching, and cleaning his feet. -

- Jesus, however, is clear -

- “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (Jn 13:8)

- Apparently those words were enough to get Peter over his initial discomfort -

- because in an instant he transitions from -

- never - - to - - wash all of me. - -

- Again Jesus is clear, -

- what he is doing is not about getting dirt off the body, -

- what Jesus is doing -
  - by washing the disciple's feet -
    - is undertaking this act for his followers,
      - for his friends, -
        - to allow them to experience
          - servant leadership -
            - to help them to understand
              - what it will mean
                - to follow in his footsteps.
- With this humble act of service,
  - Jesus is setting an example of caring for neighbor, -
    - setting an example of the selfless love -
      - and inviting us to make compassion
        - and selfless love a hallmark of our own ministry. - -
- Now, interestingly, of the two things that Jesus told us to do -
  - on that evening when the disciples and Jesus gathered -
    - prior to Jesus' arrest,
      - foot washing didn't exactly catch on
        - in the same way that communion did, - -
          - I mean I've never been to a church -
            - with weekly footwashing -
              - or a footwashing rail around the altar,

- but even though we don't wash each other's feet -
  - each time we gather for worship -
    - that doesn't negate the lesson Jesus was teaching the disciples
      - teaching us -
        - when he wrapped that towel around his waist -
          - took the basin -
            - and began to clean the disciples
              - dusty, smelly feet. - -.
                - For through this unexpected act, -
                  - Jesus modeled an approach to leadership -
                    - modeled an approach to relationship -
                      - that would become hallmarks of the Christian life - - -
                        - humble, abundant love - - -
                          - and generous care for one another.
    - On the night in which he was betrayed, -
      - Jesus took the time to show love -
        - to demonstrate humility,
          - to shower caring upon his friends. - -
    - And he invites us -
      - to follow his lead, - - -
        - to love one another as he loved us -
          - to serve one another as he served us -

- to be generous to one another as he is generous with us. -
- Now realistically, -
  - for most people -
    - that won't mean washing the feet of our friends -
      - because the response many people have to feet is well - - "Ick", -
  - but -
    - even if we have trouble envisioning foot washing in our future,
      - we can still serve, care for and love one another -
        - with the same generous, compassionate, selfless spirit -
          - which Jesus demonstrates that evening. - -
  - The specifics of how we follow Jesus' example -
    - will vary,
      - of course,
        - depending upon the circumstances of our lives. - -
    - For some it will mean -
      - washing the hands and feet of a loved one -
        - who can no longer care for themselves. -
    - For some it will mean -
      - taking the time to stop and talk to the person -
        - who is new to the community -
          - or who feels like they are on the outside looking in. -
    - For some it will mean -

- offering forgiveness and understanding -
- in a moment of trial. -
- For some it will mean -
- sacrificing a personal desire -
- for the sake of lifting up a family member or friend.
- For some it will mean -
- being present in the darkness of grief and loss
- or being patient in a moment of growth and maturity. -
- And for some it will mean -
- investing your time and your gifts -
- in caring for those who are lacking proper resources. -
- I can't tell you exactly what it will look like for you -
- to serve, care for and love one another -
- with the same generous, compassionate, selfless spirit -
- which Jesus demonstrates on his last evening with his disciples, - -
- but as we are fed and nourished by the bread and wine of communion,
- as we are supported by the body of Christ which surrounds us,
- and as we are inspired by Jesus' example and teaching,
- I am convinced that you and I and all of God's people,
- can follow Jesus' example - -
- and make humble service a hallmark of our lives -
- sharing through our actions,

- the love of God -

- with the world.