

**7:00pm Maundy Thursday**  
**John 13:1-15**

Mabel was a fiercely independent woman, to the end of her life, even though she suffered tremendously from arthritis in her legs and in her feet. To temporarily alleviate her pain she had a ritual of using over the counter ointments and medicines. But over time, she became so stiff that she was not able to bend over and reach her own toes and legs to rub on the stuff. So, others had other people do this for her. And everyone followed **her exact instructions.**

Right before going to sleep, a caregiver would sit at her bedside with Que-tip swabs saturated with mercurachrome, bath the area between her toes and under her toe nails. Then the person would slather on an abundant amount of Aspercream all over her legs. Finally, Mabel would want to be tucked in for the night, with a pillow placed **exactly** between her legs for more comfort.

Although someone else was doing the foot and leg care, Mabel was, in a sense, **in charge of the operation. Because if you didn't do it the way she wanted, she would let you know it!**

Mabel liked being in control.

In the gospel we have just heard, Peter is a man who also likes being in control – he is a man who is in the know. He knows how everyone has a set role in life and that everyone is supposed to live life according to those roles. I think this is something we all share with Peter, to some extent. But Jesus is about to shatter Peter's set ideas of what is honorable and what is shameful.

Jesus has gotten up in the middle of dinner, removed his outer garment, tied a towel around his waist and began washing feet. As he bends down to wash Peter's feet, Peter shouts out **“You're not going to wash my feet are you? NO! You will never wash my feet!**

Peter was so surprised and uncomfortable and resistant to Jesus' gift of washing feet because Jesus was taking on the role of a servant. **Why would a teacher, a Rabbi, a man called “Lord,” need to be washing feet?** It's unseemly. It was a **scandal - a violation** of what was right and proper in Jewish society. There was Jesus, assuming the role of a servant, a person

with no rights of his own, someone who existed simply for the sake of others - Jesus was breaking down established rules of relationships based on superiority and inferiority – those static categories that we are so good at creating and maintaining.

By doing this, - by bending down to serve in this common, lowly way, Jesus was getting close to his disciples, and to us- but without losing his knowledge who he was. Jesus was aware that he had been given all things from God – all power and authority on earth and yet, he chose to relinquish the power, to be with us and demonstrate his love for us in this most humble way.

And he tells Peter, *“Unless I wash you, you will have no share in me.”* Unless we can let go of our need to control and let Jesus come close to us, and love us the way he desires to show his love, we will not fully experience the living God who is with us in the most ordinary ways of our lives. We will miss out! Unless we can truly just receive God’s gift of Love, we will have no share in him. This is the place where we begin – **receiving**. And to receive God's love so fully is to acknowledge– **I need God’s love. And, our need for other people to help us experience God’s love for us.**

And then, once we have graciously received, we can give the gift away. We can go into the world and be Christ to one another. We can follow Jesus’ example and *“do as he has done for us.”* We can wash one another’s feet.

And that is what we are inviting everyone to today. Washing feet on Maundy Thursday is an archaic and outmoded custom for us. For the most part, we all wear shoes and socks, walk on paved roads, sidewalks, and do a lot of riding in cars and trains. Our feet aren’t dusty and dirty like the disciples’ feet. It’s almost surprising that marketing people haven’t begun a “Support your local pedicure parlor” on Maundy Thursday. Giving attention to our feet is something we tend **to pay** people to for.

### **So why do we do it?**

I think we continue to do this because it is simply a gift we can give one another. It is a simple gesture that represents God’s care and love for us. And, it is the example that Jesus gave us. To wash feet is as explicit as his command to remember him in the bread and the wine.

Jesus wanted so deeply to be with his disciples. And especially, on this evening before he will be taken away, brutalized, and killed, he instructs them to remember him whenever they eat the bread and drink the wine. This longing that Jesus has to be part of our lives – **our very bodies**, comes about through the bread and the wine that we will consume at communion today.

As we receive the bread and wine, we receive Christ into our bodies. **Being in Christ, all our relationships change.** We no longer have to compete with one another. We no longer have to see each other through a hierarchy of relationships. We are **all** part of the **one** who “*was and is and will be forever.*”

How will you allow Jesus to wash your feet? To know you? To love you? How will you improvise this foot washing when you leave here? How will we translate **Christ’s power of servant hood** into building God’s kingdom? Will the structures of your lives be changed? Will your **relationships** with your **family members** or **work** colleagues be **transformed**? How will be shareholders in God’s kingdom?

**Jesus asks us: Do you know what I have done to you?**

He has loved us to the end.

When we truly believe this love that God has for us is so deep, so real, and so ordinary, then we can let go of our controlled, prescribed ways of knowing God, and let God come to us in unexpected, - even humble ways.

**Then we can be free to go and do as Christ has done for us. Amen.**