

Maundy Thursday – Holy Week: March 29, 2018  
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry  
John 13: 1-17, 31b-35  
Sweet, Sweet Service

*Jesus models for us what Christian community is – humility and service to one another.*

If you've ever taken a flight overseas, the airline stewards come through with hot wet towels so you can wipe the hours of yuck off your face and hands. They feel so good, especially if you've been asleep.

Would you like to wash your hands? (Handing out hot washcloths) Here, have a hot towel.  
How does that feel? Feel good? Anyone else want one?

On that night in which Jesus gathered with his disciples; he took a towel and tied it around his waist. He took a basin and towel and began to wash the disciples' feet. Peter couldn't get his head around it. The reversal was too great.

"You will never wash my feet." Peter says. Jesus responds by saying, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

There is something reciprocal about this strange washing. Unless you allow me to get you wet, then we cannot be in relationship. There is a give...there is a take.

I get Peter. I think we all do, actually. For we live in this strange culture that says, "Man up." Do it yourself. Don't ask for help. We grant a mysterious respect to those who are able to "handle it" all. To juggle the demands of home and work and kids and aging parents and community commitments and pay the bills and oh don't forget, the oil in the car needs to be changed....is to wear this odd badge of honor. Never mind that your superman or superwoman cape is getting pretty frayed around the edges and the Doctor keeps refilling your blood pressure medicine.

No, we just soldier on as if that's the best way. You know. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Do it yourself. Don't ask for help. Never mind the bootstraps actually tore apart last year and your high heel broke.

Oh, there is something reciprocal about this strange washing.

I mean really. I can wash my own feet. Who wants to see my feet anyway? They're ugly. My toes are crooked. They smell in fact.

When Jesus knelt to wash, He did something to the disciple's bodies. Yes, he saw all their calluses and crooked toes. But more than that, Jesus touched their bodies with his Body. And in doing so, He touched the whole Body. He was making a community.

Remember back in elementary school on the first days of school? "This is the way we line up. This is where your finished work goes. This is where we hang our coats. This is the way we put the heading on our papers. This is the way...we do things."

She wasn't saying it to one student. She was saying it to the whole class.

Jesus was saying it to the whole class – the whole Body. "This is the way...we do things."

He said, "Do you know what I have done to you? I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Ahh. That's it. That's why this strange washing is reciprocal. Love goes two ways. Love is not a one way street.

Can you hear Peter still quietly protesting in the background? "Oh, I can do it myself!"

Well. No, Peter you cannot. None of us can.

In our brave attempts to do life on our own, we forget a critical piece. The servant has joy in serving. The servant has joy in serving. And when we say no to mysterious mutual reciprocal foot washing, we dis-honor the one who comes to honor and serve us.

Many years ago, I preached a sermon on service. After church, a woman, came up to me and said, "What would you like for dinner tonight?" "Excuse me?"

“I’d like to make you dinner. Tell me what you can eat and what time you want it at your house.”

Several hours later, she showed up at my front door with three hot dishes in her hands. This was a mom, busy with her own family. I thanked her profusely and as she was leaving, she said, “Well, you told us we need to serve. And you’re always serving us, but you need some help once in a while too.” Can you imagine how hurt she would’ve been, had I refused her offer of a hot meal?

“Take and eat. This is MY BODY, given for you.” Jesus’ body shared with all of us. The giver. The receiver. Love on a two way street. The servant is serving us.

Jesus formed His community of disciples, Christ’s body on earth in that moment, by teaching them to serve one another. In humility. In honesty. In service.

Service marks the Christian community. Any disciple of Christ, knows the power in giving of self. Not the kind of serving that makes us a victim and is detrimental to our health and well-being. Not self-deprecating service. Rather, we followers of Jesus, we know the joy of heart felt giving of self. God’s work, our Hands, right?

We give our bodies, for another’s sake.

While studying in Zimbabwe, my class of seminary friends were told repeatedly not to give food to the children who would beg from us. Indeed the kids would follow us around, knowing we had money, we strange white people who didn’t speak their language. “Don’t give them food.” My friend Darren followed the rules until the last day.

He told the kids to bring their families and meet him on the corner by the grocery store. Darren took the remainder of the money he had and went through that grocery store, buying bread and lunchmeat and cookies and sodas. He filled several plastic bags to the brim. He was as excited as a little kid, filled with joy in anticipation of what was about to happen.

They all were waiting outside. I watched from a distance. Darren is as Norwegian as one can be: tall, blonde curly hair with striking blue eyes. They stared at him – these dark skinned lovely, hungry people. He sat down on the sidewalk and all the children with a few parents, sat down around him – a group of maybe 15 or 20. Passing out food, there were smiles and excitement for a cookie. It was a picture of heaven on earth. “This is my body. Given for you.”

Strange mysterious reciprocal meal – the hungry being fed – the giver being fed.

Each time we eat of this meal, we honor the Lord who served us by giving us His life. We don't refuse the meal.

Each time we eat of this meal, we remember ‘this is the way we do things’. We are made a community who lives by serving others in Jesus' name.

Each time we eat of this meal, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

A woman was going through the communion line and her pastor gave her a piece of bread. Rather as he tore it off, it turned into what was large hunk of bread. She tried to give it back saying, “This is too much for me!”

The pastor pressed the bread into her hands and replied, “It's too much for all of us.”

Take and eat. Amen.