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Peoples Presbyterian Church
March 24, 2016

John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
Maundy Thursday

PSALM 116:1-2, 12-19

¹I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.

²Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

¹²What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?

¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,

¹⁴I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.

¹⁶O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

JOHN 13:1-17, 31b-35

Kelly: Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.

Then he poured water into a basin (**Nancy pours water into font**) and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered,

Nancy: "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Kelly: Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered,

Nancy: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Kelly: Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him,

Nancy: "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

Kelly: For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them,

Nancy: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Kelly: When Judas had gone out, Jesus said,

Nancy: "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

SERMON

One of my favorite feelings in the whole world after working outside or going for a run or traveling all day or doing anything even remotely dirty is taking a shower. I have a thing about feeling clean, I just don't feel like myself until I've taken a good, hot shower. When I wake up in the morning, John is gracious enough to make sure the kids are taken care of, so that the first thing I do is brush my teeth and take a hot shower. Feeling clean, to me, kind of resets my brain, in a certain sense. After I've travelled all day, I don't feel truly at home until the smell of the airplane is washed off. When I wake up

in the morning, I don't really feel ready to face the day until my hair is washed. I'm not totally sure why, but I'm fastidious about taking showers, because then I can face whatever is next. Like, to the point that I really can't function well, I'm totally distracted, my mind won't focus until I've showered off. I like to think this is an understandable and delightful quirk of my type-a personality. John likes to call this a bit crazy-making. Either way, it gives me a good connection to this foot-washing story of Maundy Thursday.

In the ancient world, you'd walk around all day in the dust and muck and animal poop, likely wearing sandals. Hiking boots and wellingtons weren't invented yet. So, when you'd arrive at a friend's house for dinner or a meeting the first thing to happen would be a foot-washing. Your friend's household servant would come in, remove your sandals, and wash off your feet. As you might imagine, this was a dirty, gross, and menial task, always performed by the servants and slaves, never by the owner of the house.

And this isn't such a foreign practice, if you think about it for a minute. We have several similar practices today. When we go over to the homes of others, quite often we'll remove our shoes at the door, especially if it's rainy or muddy outside. We don't want to track footprints through their clean home. And in many Middle Eastern, African, and Asian homes and restaurants you'll often be served a hot, wet towel before dinner, or a basin of water. You wash off your hands, right there at the table, so that you're ready to eat. In Ethiopia this is not just a way to honor your guests, but also a hygienic necessity as you eat not with utensils, but with your hands and a spongy bread called injera. When I flew to Ethiopia years ago, the flight attendants on Ethiopian Airlines came by several times

throughout the flight with piles of hot, wet towels to wash our hands with. That, of course, massively appealed to my internal need to feel clean while travelling. Even when it's not a part of the dinner ceremony, it is still considered quite polite to go and wash your hands before sitting down to eat. So, while having our feet washed by servants upon entering a house may feel distant, it's actually not so far removed from what we normally experience in polite company.

And so what Jesus does here, it's not that the act of washing feet is somehow foreign or unexpected, in fact, quite the contrary, the disciples very much expected it to happen. What is so jarring about the scene is who is doing the foot washing. This is, as you might imagine, a dirty, yucky job, a task best left to the lowest slave. And yet, here is Jesus, the leader of the pack, the guest of honor, the messiah and son of god, down on his hands and knees, towel and basin in hand, washing the dirty, bunion-y, poo covered feet of his disciples. It's uncomfortable and more than a bit odd. And it's not the first uncomfortable moment of this night. Although it feels so normal to us now, imagine the looks the disciples would have given each other around the table when Jesus said that that loaf of bread was his body, and that cup of wine was his blood. And what about Judas? One of your own just getting up and leaving in the middle of dinner? All the way around, this Last Supper, it was full of surprises and unexpected moments.

But this is why we gather on this night, to remember and to celebrate and to live into these unexpected moments at the end of Jesus' life. Jesus was so good at taking ordinary, expected things and turning them into lived experiences of the holy. Foot washing, it

was ordinary, routine, even boring. Servant stuff. And then, all of a sudden, Jesus is down there on his knees, doing that servant work. And we see: oh! That's what it means. That's what it means when Jesus said that the last should be first, that we should lead by becoming slaves, that he welcomed the children and the sinners and those other people forgot. Love is best exemplified in loving and serving in ordinary, menial, and even humiliating ways.

And he takes that cup and that bread, and we see: oh! That's what it means. That's what it means when Jesus takes ordinary things and makes them holy. That's what it means when Jesus can take us, just boring, everyday, ordinary people and turn us into bread for the world. That's what it means when he asks us to go out and do the same. We wash peoples feet, we serve them in the same way we have already been served by Jesus. We feed people, both literally when they are hungry, and figuratively with the same love we have already received in Jesus. We take the ordinary, and in the power of Jesus, we turn it into love incarnate, the holy, the gift of God for this world.

So, tonight we're going to be celebrating the feast of the Lord's Table, once again breaking, remembering, blessing, eating, drinking, and being sent out to bless others. And when we come to that table, remember. Be fed. And be sent.

But we won't be practicing foot washing tonight, instead, I'd like to leave you with a poem. I read it to Session the other night, and I would invite you to listen, to imagine Jesus washing your feet or your hands, and to experience the love of God made manifest in the hands of God's servant:

Handwashing

Lucy Nanson

Wash my hands on Maundy Thursday, not my feet
My hands peel potatoes, wipe messes from the floor
change dirty diapers, clean the grease from pots and pans
have pointed in anger and pushed away in tears
in years past they've smacked a child and raised a fist
fumbled with nervousness, shaken with fear
I've wrung them when waiting for news to come
crushed a letter I'd rather forget
covered my mouth when I've been caught out
touched forbidden things, childhood memories do not grow dim
These hands have dug gardens, planted seeds, picked fruit and berries, weeded out and
pruned trees
found bleeding from the rose's thorns,
dirt and blood mix together when washed before a cup of tea
Love expressed by them
asks for your respect
in the hand-shake of warm greeting, the gentle rubbing of a child's bump
the caressing of a lover, the softness of a baby's cheek
sounds of music played by them in tunes upon a flute
they've held a frightened teenager, touched a father in his death
where cold skin tells the end of life has come but not the end of love
comforted a mother losing agility and health
With my hands outstretched before you
I stand humbled and in awe
your gentle washing in water, the softness of the towel
symbolizing a cleansing
the servant-hood of Christ
Wash my hands on Maundy Thursday
and not my feet.