

Maundy Thursday ~Year C  
Saint Paul's Episcopal Church  
April 5, 2007

*"Love One Another "*

---

**Lessons for the Day**

- ✘ Exodus 12:1-14a
- ✘ Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25
- ✘ I Corinthians 11:23-26 (27-32)
- ✘ John 13:1-15 or Luke 22:14-30

**Homily**

I greet you in the name of **God our Creator, Christ our Brother**, and the **Holy Spirit** who sustains and sanctifies us, empowering us to love and to serve both God and Christ.

**Amen.**

A friend of mine is quite an athlete, and has often used his skills to coach the youth teams on which his children play. He loves to tell the story of his youngest daughter -- coming off the court during the first timeout of her first basketball game. She wore a look of obvious distress, and my friend gently asked her, "Molly, what's the matter?"

To which Molly replied, "**That girl on the other team is touching me -- and she doesn't even know me!**"

**Molly didn't mind playing -- she just didn't want to be touched! I wonder how many of us feel the same way -- sitting here in church with the prospect of having our feet washed. How many of us would join Peter in refusal to Jesus:**

**"You will never wash my feet!"**

John 13: 8a (NRSV)

There's **something just a little too-intimate** about this whole foot-washing thing -- taking off our shoes, having someone in our personal space splashing water on us, and then dealing with the whole damp feet thing. Plus -- **then we have to reciprocate! We have to -- in obedience to Christ -- touch someone else and serve them in washing their feet.**

**The whole thing is not at all dignified.** Can't we just skip over this part and get on to the resurrection? **It's all so messy and intimate.**

And it ***is*** messy -- this washing others' feet and this having our feet washed, this living like Jesus called us to live -- **it is messy, indeed. And intimate beyond description.**

---

**Here's a little piece of liturgical and lectionary minutia for you:** in the Episcopal Church, we are **guided in our readings by the lectionary** -- a set of lessons appointed for each day of the church calendar. The readings are appointed in a three-year cycle (A, then B, then C), so that -- for instance -- the readings for the first Sunday in Advent for year A are not the same as the readings for the first Sunday in Advent for years B or C.

**And here's the minutia; here's the surprise:** the **readings appointed for Maundy Thursday are the same for all three years** -- for year A and year B and year C. Evidently **these readings convey big, important stuff.** Perhaps we should pay attention . . .

Today's reading from **Exodus** reminds us of the first Passover -- when the children of Israel were delivered from death by the sacrifice of a pure lamb. The **Psalm** appointed for today **recounts God's faithfulness in leading the**

**children of Israel out of captivity** with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. (An event, incidentally, that happened not long after the first Passover.)

**Every Maundy Thursday we are called to read these exact passages** -- every Maundy Thursday **we are reminded that our God is a God who saves** -- a God who delivered the children of Israel in the Passover and then led them through the wilderness with a pillar of fire and pillar of cloud.

And we are also called to the **New Testament lessons** appointed for today -- an **alternate Gospel** (Luke 22:14-30) **reminds us of the institution of the Lord's Supper** in the Upper Room, and our **brief lesson from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth echoes that story.**

**But it is to this whole foot-washing thing -- to this vexing passage from John -- that I want to return . . .**

**"That girl's touching me, and she doesn't even know me!" My friend's daughter didn't want to be touched by her opponent** -- someone she did not even know -- in her basketball game.

**Simon Peter didn't want to have his feet washed by Jesus.** He didn't want to be touched in this intimate way. Peter did not want to be served, to be cared-for, to be cleansed -- even though he and Jesus had lived and worked together and knew each other well. It just seemed too undignified, too messy. **Yet Jesus responds:**

**"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."** John 13: 8b (NRSV)

At this point **Peter** -- in his **characteristically bi-polar manner** -- asks Jesus to wash **"not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!"** John 13: 9b (NRSV)

Jesus then goes on say that he is setting us an example: if he, **our Lord and Teacher, is willing to assume a servant position, then we -- in imitation of him -- should do the same.** A few verses later in John we find Jesus saying this:

**"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.  
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

John 13: 34, 35 (NRSV)

**What might it mean if we followed Jesus command** -- if we were willing to serve as he modeled for us less than twenty-four hours before he died? What might it look like? **My guess is it would be like foot-washing -- messy and intimate. And also holy -- and obedient.** Here's what might happen . . .

**You might find yourself like a dozen of your fellow church members -- sleeping on cots** in barrack-like accommodations. **Bathing in communal showers** and helping rebuild the devastation wrought by **Hurricane Katrina in southern Mississippi.** Intimate. Messy. Holy. Obedient.

Or you might find yourself -- as many of you did some years ago -- **turning out at Saint Paul's to welcome the homeless** as they slept on the floor of the dining room. Messy. Intimate. Obedient. Holy.

You **might find yourself assembling meals** in the Colhoun room -- meals that will help fight world hunger. Or you might find **yourself building a Habitat house** -- decent affordable housing for folks who had none before. Obedient. Holy. Intimate.

You might find yourself **volunteering for the summer enrichment program**, or **Kid's Café**, or the **Augustine Project.** Face-to-face with people we name as brothers and sisters, yet people we rarely encounter. Intimate. Holy. Obedient.

Or you **might find yourself over in the Outreach Center** -- working hand-in-hand with Mike Bradshaw to interview and know and serve someone who has swallowed their pride and asked for help. **You might look them in the eye, intimately, and care for them as no one had in a while (or, perhaps, forever).** Holy. Obedient. Intimate.

You might even find yourself **lying on a table tomorrow at the Bloodmobile in Saint Paul's youth room -- lying there while someone thoroughly scrubs not your feet but your arm. Lying there while your lifeblood pours into a bag -- a unit of blood that will someday save the life of a sick or injured person.** Messy, yes. And oh-so-intimate. And Holy, too. And obedient.

If all this sounds just oh-so-exhausting you might follow Jesus' example in other ways. You might **reach across the deep and broad divisions in American (and Episcopal) political life to really get to know someone with whom you disagree.** To listen to them not to frame your rebuttal, but simply to hear and to know and to understand. Intimate, indeed. Holy -- very Holy. Messy, too. And very obedient.

**Perhaps there is someone -- in this church or elsewhere -- that you just simply do not like. No sin in that -- at least not so far. There is no command to "like" one another.** There is a very clear command, however, to love one another. So pray for that person. Pray for their health and their soul and their family and their journey to God. **Pray as if your very life depended on it. For it well might.** Holy, indeed, this prayer. And intimate beyond words. Obedient. And messy.

**Every Maundy Thursday we read these very same passages. There must be a reason. There is.**

The word "Maundy" comes from the Latin phrase *mandatum novum* -- a "new commandment". And the **new commandment -- as we read earlier in John -- is for us as Christians to love one another.**

Yes, you'll have to touch others. And yes, you'll get touched -- both physically and emotionally. Yes, it is messy. And intimate beyond belief. But it's also holy. And it's obedient, too -- you heard what the man said:

**"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another.  
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

John 13: 34, 35 (NRSV)

Go in peace to proclaim the love of Christ to a dark and hurting world.

**Amen.**