

Sermon Maundy Thursday 2024

When I was working in the business world, one of the quips I heard most often, whether it was from my boss or from a customer was “What have you done for me lately?”

Whatever I had done before was over and done with. Now the boss or the client was saying, “yes, you did do that thing I wanted, but to stay on my good side, what’s the next good thing you’re going to do for me?”

It’s not surprising. Those for whom we work expect that we will continue to do good work, to offer more service, to be present to solve their problems. It’s the way our competitive economic system works. It’s transactional. But it sometimes feels a little different, like pressure to perform, doesn’t it?

So what makes the commandment that Jesus gives us in today’s gospel feel so different?

“Love one another,” he says. “Just as I have loved you, love one another.”

It’s a commandment, to be sure, but it feels qualitatively different. Why? Because, as Jesus says, he has done it first. He has modeled for us what he expects of us. He has loved us, and expects that we will respond not just by loving him, but by paying it forward and loving others.

This Gospel story of the last supper, when Jesus turns everything upside down by washing the disciples’ feet – the master shouldn’t do that for his followers, but he does – and then leads them in the meal, even as he knows that one of the disciples will betray him. And then he says “love one another.”

It’s such a simple phrase, and yet we find it so difficult to do.

But let's remember who says this phrase.

This is the one who, though divine, is willing to get on his hands and knees to wash the dirty, dusty feet of his disciples. Even though it scandalizes some of them, especially Peter!

It has been a fact of life that in many of the parishes I've been a part of, we actually did wash each others' feet, and the number of freshly pedicured toes I washed always caused me to smile. No one wanted their feet to seem icky to the person who would wash their feet. But these disciples of Jesus are working class men who have tromped all over the place with their Rabbi, and their feet have not been given a pedicure. They're hard and callused and some might have some sort of foot rot. And Jesus gets down and washes their feet, even though that is a task usually done by servants, not by the host of the dinner.

What is Jesus doing?

He is showing them what love looks like. They would soon see the great act of love he did for them – for us all – when he died on the cross. For them. For us all. These two actions – washing the feet of the disciples and dying on the cross – were both expressions of the kind of love called *agape*, or love in action. Visible love, not just a warm fuzzy feeling. Humbling himself in the most extreme way, first at this last common meal, then in his dying.

He was showing us the way. The way of love, as our Presiding Bishop so often reminds us. To be a follower of Christ is to love. Humbly, extravagantly, without judgment, without a second thought. As Jesus did. Because Jesus washes our feet metaphorically all the time, because Jesus loves us, because Jesus gave us

the sacrament of this precious shared meal, because Jesus continues to encourage and love us to the end.

That's what Jesus has done for us lately.

So what have you done in the name of Jesus for someone else lately? What will you do next? May this night be the start of a mission in your heart to love another in an active way and may you be a blessing because of it.

Amen.