

Lectionary B Good Friday, April 3, 2015
Emanuel Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
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Exodus 12:1-4, [5-10], 11-14
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

What in the World Am I Going to Do?

Some key phrases I heard in the Gospel are: His *hour* had come.... He loved them to the *end*.... You do not know *now* ... but *later* you will understand.

Let's forget for a moment that we know about Good Friday and Easter. Let's put ourselves in the setting with the disciples and Jesus at this dinner. John tells us Jesus knows it's time. He knows what's coming and in this moment at this meal, Jesus loves the disciples as much now as he ever did. His last time with them is a time of deep love. And Jesus knows the disciples don't have a clue what's going on.

Can we imagine how strange all this must have been for those 12 guys from such backgrounds as fishermen and farmers and tax collectors. In fact those last few years that they spent with Jesus must have been a whirlwind of confusion and surprises. They professed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the one who would lead the Jewish people to victory, but, whoa! Jesus' actions just didn't match up to what they thought this Messiah was supposed to do.

And now in this room, right in the middle of their dinner, Jesus throws them another curve. "*[Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*"

Feet are washed before guests come to the table to eat and they are washed by servants, not by the host of the meal. What was Jesus doing? No wonder Peter protested. "*Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*"

Jesus tried to appeal to Peter to trust him. “You don’t get it now, but later you will understand.” Not Peter. *“You will never wash my feet.”*

Peter didn’t understand. This really wasn’t about dirty feet. Jesus didn’t suddenly realize that he was sitting there eating with a bunch of hooligans with smelly feet. No, it wasn’t about dirt or feet. It was about love.

Jesus was teaching these guys about unconditional, sacrificial love. He was showing them that love ignores social status, and protocol, and rules. Jesus was stretching them one more time. All through his time with them Jesus challenged them and this last meal was no different. Jesus was patient. *“You do not know now ... but later you will understand.”*

After Jesus finished washing his disciples’ feet, including Judas’, he explained, *“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.”*

Can you see the confusion these guys felt? They could always count on Peter to say out loud what they must have all been feeling. Jesus was talking about going away, some place where they couldn’t go. *“Where I am going, you cannot come.”* Then Jesus makes it a little clearer.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

“What’s going on here? Jesus is leaving us and he wants us to wash feet?” Maybe it was starting to soak in,(no pun intended). Jesus did not call these twelve guys from the crowds of farmers and fishermen so that they would be top dogs with Jesus as rulers of the world. Jesus called them to serve, to carry on his ministry of loving people after he

departs. And we can almost hear the disciples asking, “What in the world are we going to do?”

I ran across a story that helped me understand the feelings these guys might have had at that moment. It is a story about a man whose wife was in labor in the hospital with their first child. He stood there in the waiting room, nervous as he could be, and finally after what seemed like forever a nurse called him back into the nursery to meet his newborn son...

Only it wasn't a son. It was sons – twin boys. Back then, when this happened they didn't have ultrasounds. He found out he was having twins the minute he looked them right in the face. The nurse let him hold them both at once. He said he remember standing there with a tiny bundle in each arm, asking God, “What in the world am I going to do?” In that moment he imagined what God might say back to him. The answer was, “Just love them.”¹

I know that feeling swept through me as I held each one of my children in my arms for the first time. “What in the world am I going to do?” Loving them was the only thing I was sure I could do. All the rest was on the job training. And believe me, I learned by making mistakes.

This whole thing on Maundy Thursday isn't about dirty feet, or imperfect human mistakes. It is about Jesus loving us to the end. It is about Jesus preparing us and feeding us with his body and blood, so that we can go do what he does for us.

. Like the disciples we have many moments in our lives as followers of Christ when we come up to a situation and ask “What in the world are we going to do?” There will be times when the dirty stinky feet of

¹ <http://reflectious.com/2010/03/25/just-love-them-a-maundy-thursday-sermon/>

others is depressing and overwhelming. They'll be dry, and cracked, calloused and worn. We see this here as our churches work together serve this city's hungry at our monthly meals.

So tonight, Jesus is calling us to remember him, with his wash basin and towel. As we come up to share the Lord's Supper, you are invited to come let me wash your hands in the basin as a symbol of your preparation to be God's servant. In that moment remember Jesus' example of how he wants us to treat other people.

And know that anytime you come up to a stinky feet situation and wonder, "What in the world am I going to do?" Listen, because it is like Jesus is saying, "See? It's simple. I'm sending you out into the world, into those crowds of people from whom I called you. Your job? Just love them." Amen