

On that first Maundy Thursday, Jesus and the disciples were sitting at the table. And I'm sure that the disciples were a bit uneasy. They knew that something was about to happen, but they really weren't quite sure what. Even though Jesus had told them, they still didn't know, because they didn't ever really understand what it was that Jesus was telling them. But Jesus clearly knew what was about to happen. He knew that his hour had come, the hour he had been waiting for, the hour of his suffering and death. This was the whole reason why Jesus came down to earth in the first place. In this hour Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of the whole world. In this hour Jesus would glorify the Father. In this hour he would leave the world again and go back to the Father. This was his hour, what he had been waiting for, what he had been working towards. But there was something that he needed to do first.

And so, Jesus gets up from the table. He takes off his outer garments, ties a towel around his waist, and begins to wash the disciples' feet. On the one hand, this was nothing unusual. It was perfectly normal for this to happen. It was a normal part of welcoming guests in those days. Because nobody wore socks back then. All they had was sandals. And even with sandals, your feet would get dirty from travel. And so a host would make sure that his guests' feet were clean. It'd make them feel welcome, the way that we might take somebody's coat when they come to visit. So in that sense, what was happening right now was perfectly normal. This is what should happen.

But on the other hand, there was nothing normal about it at all, because Jesus was the one doing it. In their minds, the disciples thought, Jesus should not be doing this. He should not be washing their feet! Because washing feet was dirty work. It was menial. It was demeaning. It was work that a servant did. It was the work of a slave. A host would make sure that it would get done, yes. He would make sure that his guests' feet were clean, but he wouldn't do it himself. He'd send his slave to do it instead. That was his job. Let him lower himself in that way! And yet, here's Jesus, a towel around his waist, washing the feet of his disciples, doing the work of a slave. The world seemed to be upside down. Everything seems to have gone crazy. This is not how this is supposed to be! Is it any wonder that Peter is so confused, and why he refuses at first?

But Jesus is not doing this, Christians, just to make them feel welcome. He's not just doing this to be nice either. Washing their feet is a picture of what is to come. This is why he says to Peter in verse 7: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Jesus humbling himself in this way, Jesus washing their feet doesn't make sense right now, but it will later, because it is a reflection of what Jesus is going to do on the cross. There at Calvary, Jesus will humble himself to the lowest place of all. He will lay down his life on the cross, not only doing the work of a slave, but dying like one too. And by giving up his life in this way, all who believe on him will be washed clean in his blood. And so washing their feet on this Maundy Thursday looks forward to the cross.

But Peter doesn't understand this. He doesn't get what Jesus is saying. After all, that's not surprising. The disciples very often don't understand what Jesus is saying. All Peter can do is think in terms of washing feet. He has no idea about the cross. He can't get his mind away from what's right in front of him. All he can see is the basin. All he can see is the towel. He can't think of anything else. So this is why he refuses again. "You shall never wash my feet!" he says. He wants to hold Jesus up. He doesn't want to let him humiliate himself in this way. "Let me do it, Jesus! Let me do it! Don't humiliate yourself like this. Why would you do this to yourself? I

should be washing your feet, not like this." But by doing this, Peter also shows that he does not yet understand the cross. He does not yet understand what it is that Jesus has come to do.

So Jesus answers Peter, verse 8: "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Again, Jesus is not talking about feet here. Jesus is still talking about the cross. "If I do not humble myself like this, Peter, you have no share with me." If Jesus did not go to the cross, how could we be forgiven? If Jesus did not humiliate himself, how could we be saved? He has to go this way, now that his hour has come. There is no other way. This is what he has come to do: to humble himself for our salvation.

But Peter still doesn't get it. He still can't get over what's right in front of him. He can only think about feet. And so that's why he says what he says. He wants to be one with Jesus, yes. He wants to be with him. After all, he's followed him this far. That counts for something. He is serious about being with Jesus. But because he can't think of anything other than feet, he says in verse 9: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Wash all of me, Jesus, if that's what it takes! Wash all of me so that I may have a share with you! If that's what I have to do, let it be done. Now, don't be too hard on Peter here. After all, how often do we misunderstand what God says to us? And Jesus isn't hard on him either. He gently corrects him. This is not about dirt on your body, Peter, but about dirt on your soul. The one who is clean through faith is already completely clean. There's no need for him to wash again. And so without another word, Jesus finishes washing the disciples' feet.

But Jesus wants to teach them something through this, Christians, and he wants to teach us something too. Because the cross is not just about forgiveness. Yes, it is forgiveness. Yes, we are forgiven through the cross. Yes, Jesus dies to forgive us our sins. That's all true. But God also makes us like Jesus through the cross. We are crucified with him so that we may be like him, as Paul says. And so through washing the disciples' feet, which again looks towards the cross, Jesus teaches us something about what it means to be like him. This is why, after he gets dressed, he says in verse 13: "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am." And that's true. He is their Teacher and Lord. He is our Teacher and Lord too, which means that he is first, which means that he is over us. He is our King. He is our Master. He is greater than us. He is the one whom we must obey. That's all true. And washing feet does not change that. Not even the cross changes that fact. Jesus is and remains the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the one to whom every knee will bow. He is our Lord and Master always.

And yet, our Lord and Master humbled himself for our sake. He took the lowest place of all. He did not remain above, but he gave himself for us so that we might live. This is why he says in verse 14: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." If our Master has done this, Christians, if our Lord and King has washed feet, humbling himself in this way for our sake, we should do the same for one another. If our King has lowered himself, why would we be proud? If our Master has given his life for us, why would we hold on to our own? It was love that led him to do these things, Christians. Love brought him down from heaven. Love led him to wash the disciples' feet. Love led him to the cross. It was his great love for us that led him to do all of these things. For that reason, we are called to love one another and to care for one another, because we have been made to be like him through the cross. As John says in 1 John chapter 4: "We love because he first loved us."

Therefore, Christians, love one another as Jesus first loved you. In humility, serve one another. In humility, care for one another. Because on this Maundy Thursday, Jesus shows us what it means to be like him.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled yourself for our sake, show us what it means to serve one another, so that we may be like you in all things; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.