

Maundy Thursday
29 March, Anno Domini 2018
St. John 13:1-15
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is such a rich and beautiful text and we would do well to consider it often. In it we see and hear the proper office and work of our Lord, Jesus. There is no other Jesus than the One the Upper Room to which sinners can look for help and comfort.

Now, we might expect that the appointed text for tonight should be the text of the actual institution of the Holy Communion. And we will hear those words just as we do every time we come to the Divine Service. We will most certainly hear those joyous Words of promise from our Savior again this evening, but where they truly belong - instituting the Holy Supper for us receive. But St. John, led by the Spirit focuses our attention on the moments before the Passover and the Lord's Supper.

What Jesus does before eating the last of all true Passover meals (and, no, there are no more Passover meals, just as there is no temple and no continued sacrificing of lambs and bulls) lays before us a beautiful picture of the only true nature of the Christian religion. And it's shocking. It's uncomfortable. It's awkward. It's unnatural. Imagine the horror of the apostles as they saw Jesus lay aside His robes, gird Himself with a towel, kneel down on the dusty floor, and take into His holy, divine hands their filthy, cracked, sweaty feet! Can you see their eyes bugging out of their heads and their mouths hanging open? Peter said what everyone else was thinking - "You shall never wash my feet!"

What right does God think He has to serve me, to do the least desired of all jobs, reserved for the lowest of the slaves? This is absolutely preposterous. God is to be served! Lords and Masters are to be waited on by their servants. They are above kneeling on the floor, cleaning dirty feet, serving others. Lords are to lord. Servants are to serve. How much more so the Lord of lords, ruler of all things visible and invisible? Doesn't Jesus know that we're supposed to be serving Him, doing good things for Him?

Yes, He knows, and that is why He was born of the Virgin Mary. That's why there is an Upper Room. That is why He kneels down, is lifted up high on the cross, and laid low again in the tomb. He does these things because you are a wretched servant who has despised the will of your gracious Master, who has covered not your feet but your heart and soul with the black filth of sin, who has prostituted yourself after the pleasures of the flesh, who has loathed the good gifts of God and longed for the devil's food, who has cast your neighbors mercilessly into hell's inferno with your self-righteous loathing of his weakness and sin, who has robbed your Lord not only of your tithes but first of your fear, love, and trust. Indeed, we are to serve God. We are to love Him and our neighbor. But, instead, we have acted like Gentile pagans who only want others to serve us and who imagine that God is the God of the good, the powerful, the clean, the self-sufficient.

Repent. You should be dismissed to hell for all eternity for your service. You need Jesus to serve you. You will never have a part with Him if He doesn't, if you think He can't or shouldn't serve you, if you are wrapped up in trying to serve Him. And that's exactly what He has done. The Lord of heaven and earth has humbled Himself to serve those who know only how to serve themselves and who delude themselves into thinking that they are capable of serving God. The Son of God has become the Son of Man in order to wash away, not just mishaps and accidental slip-ups, but the darkest and worst of your rebellion. He has come to wash away the thick, black, filth of your very real and very deadly sins.

Jesus hasn't come to be served by you. You can't. He has come to do what is unimaginable and repulsive to the sinful mind. Jesus has come to step beneath you and serve you, to wash you clean by dying your death for your sin. He has girded Himself with your flesh and then girded His holy and spotless flesh with every unkind word, every self-serving thought, every lustful glance, every crude joke - all of your sin, all of your guilt. He has claimed it all as His own so that with it He could also claim your damnation and your death and bear them for you. He strips you of what you deserve and girds you with what you don't. He gives you forgiveness - fully and freely. He gives you comfort in your sadness. He gives you hope in the dark hours of suffering and temptation. He gives you peace when your conscience is again pricked by the knowledge of your sin. He gives you life. Indeed, He gives you Himself.

For there, in the Upper Room, Jesus did what He continues to do for His children, for you, for sinners to this very day, even again this night. He kneels before you to serve you. He takes from the altar and through these called and ordained sinful hands feeds you His holy Body and precious Blood that once bore your sin and now sit at the right hand of God in victory over sin, death, and hell. From this called and ordained sinful mouth your Lord and Master speaks the Word of Absolution so that the Law's accusation might be stopped.

Dear children of God, you are clean, not by anything you have done, but because Christ your Lord and Savior and served you, because Jesus, by the agony and bloody sweat of Good Friday, has cleansed your head, your feet, your heart, your mind, your soul. He has put away your death. He has promised to you the resurrection to eternal life. He has promised you an entrance into eternal life where disease and sadness and death have no place. And here again, even this night, and every Divine Service, your Lord comes to you, not to be served but serve you with life.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.