

On this Maundy Thursday, we gather to commemorate the last supper of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, where he gave his disciples a new commandment, saying – *just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

As we reflect on the events leading up to his crucifixion, we are reminded of two powerful stories in the Gospel of John that reveal what it means to love one another as the Lord has loved us. And both of these pictures of love are powerfully presented to us in the anointing and washing of feet.

The first story is found in John 12:1-8, where we see Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. This act of devotion was not only an expression of Mary's love for Jesus, but more specifically, it was to prepare his body for his impending death and burial. This is important, which I will come back to.

The second story is found in John 13:1-19, where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. This was not only an expression of Jesus' love for his disciples, **but it too was a means of preparing them to follow in his footsteps, preparing them to die for Christ, just as Christ was to die for them.**

Both of these stories use similar words, teaching us that these two stories are meant to be read together and are to interpret one another. In John 12 Mary anoints the feet of Jesus and wipes them with her hair. In John 13 Jesus washes his disciples feet, and wipes them with a towel. The key words here are **feet and wipe.**

But notice also that Judas is referenced in both stories in a similar way. In John 12, after Mary anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them

with her hair, Judas is described as “**Judas Iscariot**, one of his disciples, (he who was about **to betray him.**)” And in John 13, before Jesus washes his disciples feet and wipes them with a towel, it says, “*During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of **Judas Iscariot**, Simon’s son, **to betray him.***”

So what do we see here in the first story? Mary loves Jesus by pouring out her wealth upon the feet of Jesus to prepare him for his death and burial. She is one who Christ refers to afterwards when he says, “*whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*” She spent her families wealth and potentially her own dowry on Jesus, thus hating her life in this world, in order to keep it for eternal life.

But Judas is the son of Perdition, and he loses his eternal life by wanting to keep his life in this world in the form of earthly treasure. So he guilt trips Mary about pouring out the expensive ointment on Jesus feet, and says that it could have been sold and the money given the poor. But he didn’t say this because actually cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and would help himself from what was put into the money bag.

In the second story Jesus loved his disciples by washing their feet. It was during that time also that they celebrated the Passover, the Last Supper, which Christ instituted in memorial of his coming death. But Judas, being led by the Devil to betray Jesus, did so in fulfillment of the Scripture which says - “*He who ate my bread has lifted up his **heel** against me.*”

This is deep irony. It was foretold in Genesis 3 that the Seed of the Woman who be the one who would lift up his heel against

the seed of the serpent, and he would bruise his heel as he crushed the serpents' head.

But when we look at the story from the view of plain history, it looks like the opposite took place. It looks like the seed of the serpent, Judas, lifted his heel against the seed of the woman, Jesus, and crushed his head by betraying him over to be crucified for 30 pieces of silver.

But we know by faith that Jesus actually crushed the head of the devil when he had his feet pierced through with nails on the cross. For the Scripture says that his feet were pierced, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed. *This is the secret hidden wisdom of God, that had the rulers of this world understood, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory.*

*But eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*

It is in light of this that Isaiah 52 says:

*How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

The Lord Jesus, whose beautiful feet, brought us the gospel of our salvation, happiness, and peace, were anointed by Mary with expensive ointment, and they were wiped with her hair, in preparation for being pierced through with a nail, and in that

piercing, crushing the head of the devil, who had the power over death and the grave.

And in his burial Christ delivered all those who through fear of death were subjected to lifelong slavery. For in His death and burial, Jesus gives *light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, in order to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

This is the good news that Christ reigns victorious over death and in death, for those whom he loved to the end. And when Christ's feet were anointed for his burial, it was a fragrance of life unto life for those in the grave.

And so, when we follow his example to wash one another's feet, I believe that this can be performed in another non literal manner of foot washing. I believe we can understand foot washing as a metaphor for helping one another to prepare for their own death and burial.

Jesus washed his disciples feet and wiped them preparing them for death and burial, just as Mary anointed Jesus feet and wiped them preparing them for his burial.

Jesus said:

*"If I, your teacher and Lord and washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."*

The Master Jesus died and was buried. And in a loving act, before His own death, he cleaned the feet of his disciples to prepare

them to follow in the footsteps of the Master, preparing them for death.

How can we apply this command today then?

I have been contemplating death recently, as I am sure you all have been as well. And I noticed something on Tuesday at Sydnie's visitation. Many people said to Devon and Kim, that they love them, and "If they need anything at all, just ask."

Now please do not think I am doubting the sincerity of their words at all. I believe all of you when you say it. But notice how much a community comes together to express its love and help in the form of service when there is a death in the family. When there is a death, that is when the community becomes hyper aware of the loss, and expresses its love and devotion to those grieving by being ready to help in those times.

But the question I thought of is, why do we not always express our love and willingness to serve others, all the time? Aren't we always in the midst of death anyways? Haven't we all been baptized in Christ's death? Don't we always carry about in our bodies the death of Jesus? Aren't we being killed all the day long, and are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered? Aren't all of us always right on the knife edge of eternity? Shouldn't we always be hyper aware of the reality of death, and therefore always be ready to follow in the footsteps of Jesus to love one another, just as if a loved one died?

The newness of the new commandment to love one another is not new in the sense that it has never existed before. But it is new in that it is to be a love that is cared for and guarded, and protected as if brand new. Like when I would get a new pair of

shoes, I was super careful about where I would wear them, and if I scuffed them up I was quick to clean them and keep them in good condition. The New Commandment to love is new in that sense. We protect and prize our love for one another daily, freshly pouring out our hearts for one another every day.

Just as Christ's love is fresh and new every morning, so should our love and service to one another be fresh and on our minds every morning as well. We should be ready to serve one another in such eagerness and urgency all the time, just as we are in times of death. Because we are always in the midst of death. That is application number 1.

Application number 2 – Since Christ's feet were anointed to prepare him for his burial, and since there is a connection between that and Christ washing his disciples feet, and telling us to follow his example – I think that we ought to always be ready to help one another to prepare to die in the Lord. How do we do that?

We comfort one another in our sufferings by encouraging one another to believe the promises of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

What is the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God? Is it not exactly what we confess in the catechism, which asks: What is only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong, with body and soul, in life, and in death, to my faithful savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with

His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. **He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation.** Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

Now, I am not saying be weird about death and dying. Don't be so obsessed with dying that that we are afraid to live. But neither be so obsessed with living that we are afraid to die and you act like it is not a reality. The middle ground is always safest.

As the BCP says: Grant us grace always to live in such a state that we may never be afraid to die; so that, living and dying, we may be thine, through the merits and satisfaction of thy Son Christ Jesus.

Encourage one another in that, people of God. And in that sense, you will wash one another's feet, and prepare one another for death and burial, as Mary anointed Jesus' feet, preparing for his burial.

So when times of sickness and death come, do not hide yourselves and your children from it. If there is a chance of death, talk openly about it. And encourage one another in the faith of Jesus Christ and in the promise of the gospel, that nothing shall separate you from the love of Christ, not even death. For that is a one of the best ways you can love one another, as Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us. And in this way, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under our feet. – Rom. 16:20. Amen.