

Andrew K. Frey. Maundy Thursday. John 13, 3-5, 12-17.  
April 1, 2021. St. John, Town of Center, WI.

**<sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God. <sup>4</sup> He got up from the supper and laid aside his outer garment. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.**

**<sup>12</sup> After Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer garment, he reclined at the table again. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me Teacher and Lord. You are right, because I am. <sup>14</sup> Now if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> Yes, I have given you an example so that you also would do just as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Amen, Amen, I tell you: A servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (EHV)**

Theme: Hands of Humility—Jesus

One of my favorite shows in recent years is called, *Dirty Jobs*. It's a show that highlights those who do the jobs that very few are willing to do; as the host, Mike Rowe, explains, he explores, "the country looking for people who aren't afraid to get dirty — hard-working men and women who earn an honest living doing the kind of jobs that make civilized life possible for the rest of us." Throughout the show's run, Mike Rowe has tried his hand in hundreds of dirty jobs: he was a septic tank specialist near Madison; he cleaned and repaired the Mackinac bridge, he has been a sewer inspector, road-kill collector, and a shark-suit tester.

Washing feet at the time of Jesus would have been considered a dirty job. It was typically reserved for servants or slaves—usually the lowest of the low would be forced to do this job. Everyone walked everywhere—on dusty roads and paths in open sandals. By the time Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover, it was evening, and everyone's feet would have been dirty, grimy, and stinky.

Typically a servant would wash feet when people first entered into a house to eat. But with just Jesus and his disciples in the upper room that night, they didn't enjoy such a service. And the disciples weren't about to do it—they weren't going to stoop so low as to do a servant's job. So, during the meal Jesus himself got up and he washed his disciples' feet, much to the shame of the disciples. Peter objected at first, knowing full-well that Jesus shouldn't have had to wash his feet—it was too low of a job for Jesus.

But that was Jesus' point! He was setting an example for them to follow. After he got done washing his disciples' feet he asked them, **Do you understand what I have done for you?** He was their teacher and their Lord; but it wasn't beneath Jesus to serve his own disciples! And he wasn't just their teacher and Lord. Did you catch the point John made at the beginning of our text? **Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God.** Jesus is God—he came from heaven and he was soon going to return to heaven. And yet, he stooped down and did the job of a lowly servant and washed his disciples' feet. Here is the eternal God, the one who created the universe, the long-promised Messiah, the King of Kings, doing a job so lowly that the disciples refused to do because it was beneath them!

He did this as an example for the disciples—and us—to follow. Not that he wants us to go around washing each other's feet, that wasn't his point. No, the example that Jesus set, is for us

to serve one another in love. To put them first and do what's best for others even if it seems as if you're too important to do such things.

But we often fail to do just that. We are too busy serving ourselves. That is the way we are by nature—we look for ways to get what we want, to improve our lives, often at the expense of others. We all know people who act as if the whole world exists to serve them; but sadly we often fall into the same sin! We think that we are above others, that we are more important; and so we don't have to do nice things for others, they should do nice things for us!

Or maybe it's because you view that the particular act of selfless service as beneath you—you have too much education, you have worked too hard, too much experience, to do something like that. We even do that at church—you think to yourself that you are too gifted, too talented to do certain things to serve the Lord.

Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin word, *mandatum*, from which we get our English, “mandate.” So Maundy Thursday literally means “Mandate/Command Thursday.” What command does this name come from? Not long after our text, Jesus says, **A new commandment I give you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another.** The command that Jesus gives us on “Mandate Thursday” is to love one another.

Of course, this isn't a new command. The Lord has wanted us to love one another from the moment he created the world and placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This is new in the sense that the Lord shows us exactly what it means to love one another. By his sacrifice on the cross in the place of us sinners, the Lord has shown us what true love is. We are to love with a selfless, unconditional love, being willing to give up everything, even our lives for others. We love just as Christ first loved us.

This command we have a hard time keeping. We sinful human being always have and always will have a hard time keeping this law of love because, once again, we are selfish and self-centered. We love ourselves and those who are close to us and so we often do what is best for us and ours, often at the expense of others. We might do nice things for others—but only because they do nice things for us or if we think we can get something from them in return.

We are often the exact opposite of the example that Jesus set for us. We aren't humble, but arrogant. We often don't serve others in love, we serve ourselves and expect others to serve us, and look down upon those who we deem not as good as us!

Jesus, of course, didn't just set us an example for us to follow when he washed his disciples' feet. The next day he showed us the great extent of his love when he humbled himself to the point of death. Jesus went to the cross to pay for our sins, to remove our guilt far from us and give us his perfect life. He paid for all of our sins—even the times when we were selfish and self-centered and failed to serve others in humility and love.

Jesus, the eternal God, the one who created the universe, the long-promised Messiah, the King of Kings, humbled himself, not just by washing his own disciples' feet; but by taking on a human flesh and dying the death that we deserve, and suffering our own eternal punishment! He didn't just do a job that no one else wanted to do, he did what no one else could do! We often act as if serving others is beneath us—but it wasn't beneath the eternal Son of God, to give up his life for us sinners—that is how much God loves us! That is the very reason why Jesus came. As he says in Matthew 20, **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.** He paid the ransom price by shedding his holy precious blood and bringing us back to our Father.

We remember this day not simply as the day that God commanded us to truly love each other, nor do we remember this day simply as a day when the Lord showed us an example of a selfless humble service. We remember this day because it is the day that Lord instituted one of his Holy Sacraments. Later on, in the evening, after he washed his disciples feet, he took some bread,

gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, **take and eat; this is my body.** Then he took the cup of wine after the Supper, gave thanks again, gave it to the disciples and said, **drink of this all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.**

For the forgiveness of sins. In the Lord's Supper, the Lord gives us his true body and blood—the very thing which he gave as a ransom for our sins—how can we not be forgiven through this Holy Supper! Whenever we receive the Lord's Supper the Lord forgives all of sins—each and every one. What love and grace the Lord gives us in this sacrament, what comfort and peace we receive whenever we stand side by side to receive his body and blood!

The Lord humbled himself to the point of death to save us sinners from our sins. And because the Lord forgave us and showed us how to humbly serve one another, we strive to live our lives in humble service to the Lord and to others. As Jesus says at the end of our text, **If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**

Sadly, we often fail to humbly show love to others as the Lord himself did. So we see the Lord on the cross as he humbled himself to the point of death. And we stand before his altar and receive his very body and blood and taste and see that we are forgiven—forgiven because Jesus did a job not just what we didn't want to do, but what we couldn't. Amen.