

Jim Gill

March 28, 2018

"Served"
John 13:1-35

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 13:1-17

Tonight we come together this evening to recall in our hearts and minds the events that occurred on the Thursday of what the church calls Holy Week. One-third of all the events that we have recorded about Jesus' life occurred during this one week-- reminding us of the great significance of these last days. The disciples have gathered in a home, who's we are not sure, but we do know that it had a furnished second floor because it was described as an Upper Room.

They had come in from the dusty roads and a meal was being served to them. In the middle of that meal, Jesus did something that Matthew, Mark and Luke all skip... Only John records that on the night when Jesus was to be betrayed by Judas, in a group of friends where brothers James and John had been lobbying for the "honor" to have seats at the right and left of Jesus when he came into his kingdom; on a night when Peter thought himself above denial and Judas had already plotted betrayal, Jesus took a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet. Hear the word of God from John 13:1-17.

Let's pray, Lord we are humbled by your example. We bow our heads and hearts in shame for the times when we have wanted to be the anything but servants; when we have thought more of ourselves than our calling to serve others. Forgive our pride and selfishness. Give us the attitude you exhibited on that night when you not only washed the feet of your disciples, but also you asked them to do the same. Amen.

**

I've had a memorable Maundy Thursday so far. It's been a tale of 4 meals. It started yesterday.

The designation "Maundy Thursday" comes from an ancient Latin anthem traditionally sung at the commemoration of the Last Supper, "Mandatum Novum Do Vobis," which means, "I give you a new commandment." Indeed, another way of identifying this day might be Commandment Thursday. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

The Holy Meal itself should be a reminder of our call to serve the needs of others.

Yesterday the Baytown Sun announced our community's choice for Citizen of the Year. It was Lee and Lelia Bates, the owners of Bates Collision. Lee was here yesterday for the Rotary lunch. After our meal was over and everyone had left Lee Bates helped me carry out the trash to the dumpster. One half of the Baytown Citizen of the Year took out the trash. That was meal 1

This morning it was my turn to drive Meals on Wheels. I was substituting for someone. I have only driven this route twice before, but I still had to make a dozen U turns to find the 5 houses on my route. Because this is opening day for the Major League Baseball season I wore my Astros shirt and World Series Cap. (The Astros were victorious over the Rangers today by the score of 4-1).

On one of the houses on my route there is a steep rise from the street to the house. With my artificial knee I do better going uphill than downhill. So after delivering the meal I did not feel like I could make it down to my car. I tried 3 or 4 times but didn't feel comfortable. So I walked to the house next door that had steps. As I walked over the people inside came outside to see who I was and what I was doing. I said, "I need to borrow your steps."

I made it down and headed to my car when the person for whom I had brought the meal came out on her porch to see if I was O.K. I said, "I'm fine." She said, 'Aren't you Pastor Gill?' She saw through my Astros disguise. I said, "Yes." She said, "I read your column in the Sun every Friday." I was blessed. I was humbled.

That was meal 2

After finishing my route I gathered up my home communion kit, poured the Grape juice in the bottle, grabbed an extra roll left over from Meals on Wheels and went across the street to take communion to Sallie Hughes. I was in her room just a few minutes when her roommate came in with her son and daughter-in-law, bearing cupcakes. It was her son's birthday. I had my guitar with me and so I got it out and we sang Happy Birthday to Bob.

I invited them to share communion with us but they did not respond at first. We visited a little and I asked them again if they would like to share communion with us. This time Sallie responded and said, "If I went to their church I wouldn't be able to take communion. Then the daughter-in-law said, "We're Catholic." I explained that Presbyterians practice Open Communion and that they didn't need to be Presbyterians to share communion with us. So the daughter-in-law smiled and said, "O.K."

I opened my kit and got out 5 cups and placed them on the bedrail and then I saw it. I had left the bottle of Welches on the sink at the church. One by one I put the cups away and apologized for my mistake. Then Sallie said, "We have iced tea." I smiled and one by one got out the 5 cups again and we shared communion with a Meals on Wheels roll and Iced Tea. We closed with the Lord's Prayer and yes....in deference to our guests I led in trespassing and forgiving those who trespass against us. Then we sang a verse of Amazing Grace. That was meal 3.

Tonight is meal 4

In the early church, people did not show up at worship and find the communion elements all prepared in advance and waiting for them. They brought their bread and

wine with them and presented them at the time of the offering, for theirs was largely a trading commerce where people dealt in kind. So the pastor would take enough of the bread and wine to be used for the communion, and the rest of it would be distributed to the poor of the community. Participating in the communion Christ automatically meant being involved in ministering with Christ to the needs of others.

As Christ gave his body and blood for the world, we are called to give ourselves.

As he washed the feet of his disciples, so we are called to outdo one another in serving and showing honor to one another.

The love of Jesus enabled him to take on tasks that would have been thought to be beneath him - servant work like washing dusty feet, for example.

As Jesus laid aside his divine glory in the incarnation, so Jesus lays aside his status as teacher to do the humble work of a servant.

Why did Jesus do it? I think he did it because he wanted to show and tell them something about himself, and something about themselves.

First, it told them something about himself. Jesus and the disciples had walked the long way from Bethany and their sandaled feet were dusty. The basin and towel were there to be used by the servant appointed for the purpose, but there was no servant, and it was evident, if feet were to be washed, one of them would have to do it. In their pride, they preferred that all, including their Master, should eat without having their feet washed, rather than any one of them doing the job. In their pride, they failed not only to minister to one another...they failed to minister to Jesus himself.

I wonder if Jesus was sorrowfully exasperated with them, the way parents get with children when they stubbornly insist on their own way, even to their hurt. Had they not been listening these last 3 years? What more could he say? How could he express the message of the love of God any more vividly? What good would more words do if they still did not understand or apply what he had been saying? So Jesus must have decided an object lesson was in order. He would act out his teaching. He would show them who he was and what his teaching was all about. He, who had come from God and was about to return to God, would wash their feet.

Humility doesn't mean groveling in the dirt. It means you have enough confidence in who you are that you can recognize yourself even when you are dirty. It means you can risk the dirt because your appearance does not have to be defined by the cosmetics of pride.

Jesus also sought to show and them something about themselves as well. He tells them that when they would follow his example they too would serve one another.

After Jesus finished washing his disciples feet he asked, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

A few moments later, after Judas had left to betray him, Jesus gave a New Commandment. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall everyone know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another?" (John 13:34-35)

The love of Jesus was able to encompass the hypocrisy of Peter, the self-serving ambition of James and John, the betrayal of Judas, and, after his resurrection even the self-righteousness of Paul. It was a love that knew no limit. He loved them so much that he was willing to die for them. That became our standard for obedience. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Of course, the heart of this uniquely Christian commandment is not simply the prevention of strife. Christ's instruction to love one another as he loved us is itself motivated by another love, love for the world outside the church. "By this will EVERYONE will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Everyone encompasses not JUST our sisters and brothers in the church. Everyone is EVERY ONE, even those outside the church so far. EVERY ONE is those we don't like or agree with. EVERY ONE is even our enemies.

One thing should be made clear here - the Lord's command is not that we like one another. That would certainly be nice, but to like or not to like is rooted in our emotions, and emotions do not respond to commands.

Christian love is not something the Lord wants us to feel for one another but rather something he wants us to do for one another. The love Jesus speaks of is not an emotion. It is a way of acting toward one another that says, "No matter what, I want good for you, and I will do whatever I can to insure that you get it."

As to how this love should be measured, our standard comes from the clause, "as I have loved you" (John 13:34). That is a broad and lofty standard indeed. The love that Jesus had for his disciples began with a willingness to ignore the limits of society. He did not content himself with a little group made up of only his "own kind" - he reached out to all kinds and especially to those whom the rest of the world would shun.

The command to love is really a command to witness with our lives, to be so winsome in our own fellowship that those outside will want to come in. Indeed, love for one another - doing for one another - may be the most effective evangelistic tool we have at our disposal.

This is a commandment with which it is easy to be uncomfortable. Even after the parameters are defined, the "speed limits" are set; the standard is so high as to be utterly intimidating. I do not know about you, but I do know about me, and what I know is that I will never be able to measure up, at least not on my own. The good news I have on this Maundy Thursday - Commandment Thursday - is that you and I are not on our own with this. We are called to serve others because... we have been served.

Let's pray. We pray, O God, that as Jesus loved us, we also might love one another. Help us to bring to his table compassion, forgiveness, and humility; that we may break down any walls of hostility that divide us. Amid our diversity help us to celebrate the unity of our common baptism that binds us together, and combine our unique talents into a whole that may better meet the needs of everyone. As we go forth to serve you, enhance our efforts that we may become more and more faithful disciples of the one who stooped to serve.