

✠ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Maundy Thursday

Good evening.

I don't think that foot washing, at least in our context, is quite the same as when Jesus washed his disciples' feet. You've *very likely* never encountered a basin for foot washing at a feast or at a dinner party. The only places you've seen one, are probably here for this service or perhaps if you've had a pedicure. What I'm getting at is this: foot washing is no longer practical, and therefore no longer practiced, as it once was. We don't typically encounter dusty or dirty roads or even sidewalks. Unless you've got a job that gets you in the mud or dust, your feet are probably just not that dirty. But as far as I can tell, this just wasn't the case in the early first century. It seems that feet really needed to be washed, because feet were dirty.

No matter how strong or weak our understanding of historical figures, no matter how strong or weak our understanding of the practice of foot washing, not one of us can imagine this same scene playing out with Herod, or Pilate, or Caesar taking the place of Jesus, stooping down, and washing the feet of everyone gathered in that upper room. Strain as we might, we would have a hard time picturing any current or historical ruler—whether president, prime minister, or king—who would stoop down and wash the feet of these disciples, or his cabinet members, or congress, or us.

But then again, this is not particularly surprising, because of exactly what Jesus says: “a servant is not greater than his master.” Why would any king, any governor, any ruler, wash the feet of his servants? A master is, by definition, greater than his servant. And yet, Jesus—the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—reveals his ineffable superiority through nothing other than service. His act of foot washing is the beginning of the revelation of what a true king does. Jesus uses this logic—that a servant is not greater than his master—not to compel lordship, but to compel service. For if the master *washes his servant's* feet, then what must that servant do? That servant must *also* serve. Our Lord's logic compels each of us to be the servant of one another.

Culturally, we have the Peter problem: “No, no, Jesus. I don't need *your* service. I need to serve *you*.”

We have bought fully—or almost fully—into the individualism of our age, believing that we somehow do not need one another, that we should not allow one another to stoop down to wash our feet, to stoop down to serve one another. It's in everything we do. It's, of course, also in me. Our society forces independence in us and upon us as through a cheese cloth or sieve or winepress. We are formed and catechized to be independent and to rely on no one other than ourselves.

What Jesus does is therefore not just for the rulers and kings of this world to emulate. It is for all of us. No one can opt out of this. In his lesson to Peter, he allows no division among the disciples. No one, as a disciple of Jesus, can opt out of serving one another. We must.

This lesson from Jesus to Peter—to *allow* service—is salve for our souls, clarity for our eyes, refreshment for our ears, health for our bodies. The numbers game is really this simple: if no one allows anyone to serve them, then no one has the privilege of carrying out our Lord's command to serve one another. None of us can serve one another, if we do not allow the privilege and good of being served.

Peter's immediate change of heart—when Jesus corrected him—is thoroughly endearing. “Well, Jesus, if you really have to wash my feet for me to be with you, you had better get to it and give me a full bath!” That's that glimpse of childlike faith from Peter. He's all in. Serve away, Jesus!

A pastor of our denomination told me that her congregation went from being squeamish about foot washing to every single person coming forward to partake. It took a few years; it began with just a few representative members; but, within a few years, everyone came together for the foot washing. Every single person.

That reality, of every single person coming forward, is unmistakably potent, reverent, meaningful, beautiful. Even the most squeamish among us, the most hesitant, the most “No way would I do that!” persons—in short, the Peters among us—even those, can see that if everyone did it, it would be a truly remarkable experience. The symbol of foot washing would become richer and enrich us. It would strengthen all of us.

For this evening, you can all breathe a sigh of relief, because of course, I’ve already administered the foot washing—and so, the riches of this ritual will have to wait another year. Until then, we can take this double-principle to heart: (1) that our Lord Jesus stooped down to serve, and (2) that our Lord Jesus did not allow his disciples to opt out of *being* served.

I am fairly confident that the president of the United States, the King of England, or any other royal dignitary that we can think up will not enter into this sanctuary, stoop down, and begin washing the feet of everyone here. But I am far more certain that the King of all Creation, entered into an upper room, stooped down, and washed the feet of his disciples. Accordingly, we can make no excuses to get out of serving one another. Nor can we make excuses to get out of allowing each other to be served by one another.

In the Corinthian Church, the richer disciples had eaten all the bread, and had drunk all the wine of Holy Communion—even becoming drunk while doing so! There was no bread or wine left for the poorer disciples to eat and drink. These richer disciples thought themselves better; they put themselves above the poorer disciples. And so, they were judged—some faced sickness and death.

Were they following the commandment our Lord set forth? Were they stooping down to serve one another? No!—they were stepping on and stepping over those who were stooped down. Rather than climbing down the ladder of greatness to serve the lowliest, they climbed on the backs of lowly fellow church members—thinking that because they were richer, they were the better men. That spiritual sickness transformed into actual, physical sickness. These men who refused to follow our Lord’s commandment to serve one another, were served sickness and death.

If we do fall into the danger of refusing to be served, or of refusing to serve, we place ourselves in close company with the Corinthian Church, and that’s because when we refuse to serve or be served, we place ourselves above one another. We may very well think we are doing the opposite: “No, I don’t want to bother that person. No, I don’t need someone to do anything for me!” We may think that we are putting ourselves below one another, because we are not putting any obligations on one another. But it is just the opposite: we are denying the opportunity for another to serve, the very opportunity that will do this or that person, him or her, you or me, a great physical and spiritual good.

Tomorrow evening we remember the greatest act of service—the greatest act—in all of history. There we shall see that the breadth of Christ’s love is revealed in his outstretched arms on the Cross. And Saturday, we shall see that the depths of his love is found down in that ancient Grave.

This evening, united together as servants of our Lord Jesus—the King who came to Serve—we shall eat the bread and drink from the cup, for in so doing, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**

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Good evening.

The priests have not yet eaten the Passover. They linger and loiter in the courtyard of the governor. And that's because they're avoiding entering the governor's headquarters, lest they be in a gentile home, lest they make themselves ceremonially unclean. If they enter, they won't be able to eat the Passover. And they want to be sure that they are able to eat the Passover the next day.

Here's a question. Which is better? Is it better for these priests to avoid becoming ceremonially unclean, or—perhaps—do you think it would have been better for them not to plot and carry out the murder of Jesus? Of these two acts—entering the governor's headquarters *or* murdering Jesus—which do you think is worse?

The priests are careful to eat the Passover; but they are even more careful to murder the true Passover Lamb.

The murder of the Passover Lamb is what took place on Good Friday. The priests (unknowingly and unintentionally!) did exactly their job—they offered up the perfect sacrifice—our Lord Jesus. And so the Lamb, upon the Cross, was slaughtered—for the sins of these priests, for the sins of Israel, for the sins of the whole world.

What I want to proclaim this evening—bursting from this clarion truth that Jesus is our Passover Lamb—is the extremely unusual fact that Jesus died.

I don't mean that it's unusual, as the Scriptures note, that Jesus died more quickly than expected, which he did. This is why his bones *do not* get broken, whereas the legs of the other two criminals who were crucified did get broken, so that they would hurry up and die. Jesus, by that point, was already dead—and the simple thrust of the spear in his side, out of which poured water and blood, proved him to be dead. (And by the way, yes, we are supposed to think of both Baptism and Holy Communion, for Jesus is the source of both.)

What I mean is that I'm not sure Jesus could have died unless he was betrayed and murdered.

Every single Gospel makes explicit that Jesus died according to the Scriptures. In other words, that there was something—many things!—that had to be fulfilled in order for Jesus to die. Matthew records Jesus putting it this way: “But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (26:56, ESV).

Every Gospel directly quotes or alludes to a portion of the things that had to be fulfilled from the Scriptures. John's Passion makes explicit reference to six fulfillments:

- This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “*Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.*”
- This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.
- This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “*They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*”
- After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “*I thirst.*”
- For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “*Not one of his bones will be broken.*”
- And again another Scripture says, “*They will look on him whom they have pierced.*”

To put this in simpler terms, these fulfillments are not really like a checklist (though it may seem that way), but are certainly more like a puzzle, and perhaps even better still—these fulfillments are a mosaic, that when completed, reveal what was always going to be the case—Christ crucified.

That these prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus reveals that God is sovereign, in control, makes promises, and keeps promises. God can actually do what he says he's going to do. God fulfills the promises prophesied in many and various ways through the prophets through his Son.

Every single Gospel crescendos with the crucifixion. And John's Gospel makes clearest that Christ's death equals the Sacrifice of the Passover Lamb. He is the perfect Lamb, the perfect sacrifice, the perfect offering, and his sacrifice *can and does* take away the sins of the world.

It is finished.

And because he has finished covering the sins of the world through his body and blood on the cross, he is free to yield up his spirit, and then to die.

What could possibly kill the perfect Son of God? Only the perfect combination of two things: (1) his perfect goodness, and (2) the evil of this world.

Think about it. If God had not made all those promises through the prophets that had to be fulfilled, what could have possibly killed Jesus? He was perfect, sinless, and untainted by original sin. I do not think he could have died a natural death. Remember who he is: the Light and Life of this world, the one through whom the world was made. I do not think death could have captured him, without the help of evil. And even evil could not have killed him, unless it was good for him to die—because he is perfectly good.

This meditation reveals that when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem to *accomplish* his death (Luke 9:31), we should take that word very seriously, very literally. Death was not something that could have just happened to him—remember how many times he evades and eludes death during his ministry! Death is something that he had to accomplish.

You see how utterly distinct we are from Jesus, how ineffable our Lord Jesus is, and how lowly we are, when we look at this inverse relationship. Life is the thing that is impossible for us; death is the thing that is inevitable for us. But it is the inverse with our Lord Jesus: he is Life—that is the given—that fact itself is the foreshadowing of the Dawn of the Resurrection; it is death that is *almost* impossible for our Lord — impossible except as the fulfillment of his promise to redeem his people.

At last we see why this day is called “Good Friday” and not “Gloomy Friday.”

The cross was the only way for Jesus to accomplish death, and it is good because it is the only way that death and those things which brought forth death—sin, evil, demons—is defeated.

We not need be sullen—especially on this day!—for the cross marks the end—not the beginning—of all sorrow, all gloom, all despair, all hopelessness, all shame, of all that is death.

Take heart, this is how Jesus has overcome the world. The sins of the priests, Pilate, and the people—and even our own sins—crucified him. And yet this evil, crucifying our Lord Jesus, of which the whole human race is culpable, is also the very thing that brings forth forgiveness—for those who respond to Christ's outstretched arms.

At the cross, Christ's outstretched arms reach east and west, encompassing the whole world. At the cross, Christ's head points heavenward—the home he has won for us. At the cross, Christ's feet point downwards, towards the Grave—the Grave that his Death makes empty.

Behold Christ's glory, radiant even and especially through the darkness of this day on the cross.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**

Day Three of the Three Days: Holy Saturday
The Harrowing of Hell

✠ **Pastor, Justin David Baker**
Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

✠ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good evening.

Today, is Saturday, the seventh day of Creation, that day when in the beginning, the Lord God rested from all that he had made, and made this day holy.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2:3, ESV)

This rest was not a prize that God kept for himself, as something that was his alone. No, he took this rest and gave it to mankind. He gave this seventh day as a blessing for his people.

This seventh day, this day of rest, this holy day—is known as the Sabbath. And all who have labored, all who have lost, all who have had the pangs of grief and fear, all who have been struck by restlessness—in short, everyone—has longed for rest.

And chief among those who longed for rest were his people Israel, who were enslaved for four hundred years in Egypt. Their cries of oppression went up to the Lord, and at long last, he delivered them through his servant Moses. And with that deliverance, came also the promise of rest:

[8] "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. (Exodus 20:8–10, ESV)

Rest is for for his all of his people, all of his animals, all his creation. What a life-giving, liberating, refreshing commandment given after four hundred years of slavery! At long last, his people again could rest. At long last, his people could again worship him on this Holy Day.

God's rest is for his people. That is the central theme and point of the Sabbath.

This is exactly what we see throughout the ministry of Jesus. For on what day did Jesus most frequently cast out demons and heal the sick and the infirm? The most frequently recorded day is—of course!—on the Sabbath. For the purpose of the Sabbath is rest, and how could anyone who is afflicted with demons or illness properly rest? Or, further how could the hungry rest on the Sabbath? How could the afflicted rest?

The cries of the hungry, the demon-possessed, the sick were heard from the Lord—and he, the Lord of the Sabbath—descended from heaven to this earth to give them rest.

Taking this to heart—would the Lord of the Sabbath stop at offering rest *only* to the living?

What is the only real logic of what the Lord Jesus will do—on this Holiest of Saturdays—on the day when his body lay at rest in that Tomb?

If our Lord Jesus descended from heaven to give rest to those who were alive, what will he do for the dead, now that he has descended even there?

What powers of oppression are left to the powers of darkness, to the principalities of evil, to satan and his host of demons? *None.*

If our Lord Jesus cast out demons and sickness among the living, what will Christ do among the dead? Will he not give them—his people—Sabbath rest? Will he not deliver, at long last, Adam and Eve and Abel, Abraham and Moses and David, Elijah and Elisha, Daniel and Job, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and all the rest of his own? Will he not deliver them at last from death?

Here we begin to see the fullness of what Christ meant when he called himself the *Lord of the Sabbath*.

It is on this Holy Saturday that Christ conquered the Grave. Behold, at long last, Sabbath rest has come even to the dead.

All those ministers of death, hiding in the creeping places of the world, inflicting their last bit of evil power, were made to face the fact that this was no longer their realm, no longer their jurisdiction, no longer theirs. Satan and his evil host were revealed powerless. The captives of Satan and his ministers of death were freed.

Friday Christ conquered Death; Saturday he plundered the grave.

[51] And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. [52] The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, [53] and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. (Matthew 27:51–53, ESV)

There is no height of heavens, no place on earth, no depths below, which is not the jurisdiction of our Lord Jesus. Everywhere is his; all of time is his.

The cries of even the dead reached the heights of heaven, and he whose abode is in the highest of heights, descended to the lowest of depths, and freed even the dead.

And still—there is the Sabbath still to come.

For what greater rest, what greater blessing, what holier place, is there—other than being with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—forever and ever?

Behold—that Sabbath—that rest—is ours when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead!

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**