

April 17, 2025 – 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 & John 13:1-17, 31b-35

St John begins this evening's Gospel reading with an important observation: "*Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.*" Jesus was not stumbling into His crucifixion blindly. He knew what was ahead—Judas's betrayal, Peter's denial, the mockery of a trial, and the agony of the cross.

And John adds that, not only is Jesus aware of this. He's in control of it. He says that Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands. Jesus was fully aware that He held full control over everything.

This is something that I've brought up a lot recently. Last week in John 3, we heard something similar: "*The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.*" And on Palm Sunday, Jesus demonstrated that same divine foreknowledge when He told His disciples exactly where to find the donkey in the village.

Jesus has everything in His hands. Not just the whole world, but the past, present, and future too. Nothing is beyond His knowledge. Nothing is outside His power. He knows what He came to do, and He chooses to do it.

But what He chooses to do next is not what we would expect. Or, at least, it's not what most of us would do in His situation, I think. Because He doesn't call down angels protect him. He doesn't set up an earthly throne of glory. He doesn't give His disciples final instructions for military resistance or political power. Instead, He gets up from supper, lays aside His outer garments, ties a towel around His waist, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash the feet of His disciples.

With full knowledge that His death is imminent, Jesus chooses to spend his final minutes with his disciples serving them. And the way He chooses to serve is kind of stunning: He washes their dirty, calloused, stinking feet. He takes on the task of the lowest household servant. And he doesn't just do it for show. John tells us that "*having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*" He does it out of genuine love.

Not only is all authority in His hands, but so are his disciples' feet. Everything about them – even the dirtiest parts. The parts that they least want him to see. The filthiest parts of their bodies. And yes, even the most unclean places of their hearts and minds. Jesus sees it all. He holds it all in his hands. And He lowers Himself to clean them.

Peter, of course, is scandalized by this and protests, but Jesus makes clear that this act of washing is not optional. It's necessary. Not because footwashing is essential for hygiene, but because it symbolizes the even deeper cleansing that Jesus is about to accomplish through His death. Washing their feet is an act that they can comprehend. The cross, however, is not. There, He will wash not just dust from their toes, but guilt from their souls.

Jesus is not only our example, though He is definitely that too. He is our Savior. His act of service is not merely a moral lesson. It is a window into His greater mission: to cleanse us from sin, to die in our place, to give His life as a ransom for many. In washing the disciples' feet, He shows what it means to love us, in all our sinfulness. And in His suffering and death, He fulfills it.

And that love continues even now. On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus also took bread and wine and gave them to His disciples, declaring, "*This is My body... This cup is the new covenant in My blood.*" Here again, Jesus bends down to serve. He gives His body and blood as food and drink. Not symbolically, not metaphorically. He places Himself in the hands and mouths of His people. He nourishes us with forgiveness, binds us together in faith, and unites us to Himself.

And this brings us to St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians. Because when he writes to the church in Corinth about the Lord's Supper, he is not writing to a congregation that is unified and peaceful. Far from it. The Corinthian church was marked by deep and dangerous divisions.

In the very first chapters of the letter, Paul confronts the Corinthians for rallying around different teachers. Some claimed allegiance to Paul, others to Apollos, others to Peter, and still others insisted they were the ones truly loyal to Christ. And these divisions were tearing the church apart.

Then, a little after that, Paul has to address another division: a case of sexual immorality that the church had not only failed to confront but had actually tolerated with a twisted sense of pride. On top of that, members of the congregation were dragging each other into court, filing lawsuits against fellow believers instead of resolving disputes within the Christian community.

They were a congregation filled with arrogance, self-righteousness, and they just plain lacked love and humility. The Corinthians were not one body. They were a splintered, divided group, more concerned with status and power than with unity in Christ.

So when Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper in chapter 11, he is addressing a congregation that has not just lost sight of what that Supper truly is. They have lost sight of what being a disciple of Jesus Christ truly is. And so, as a result, they come to the Lord's Table with pride, not repentance. With division, not unity.

Some were eating their fill while others went hungry. Some treated the Supper as a private meal rather than a sacred meal for the whole Church. And so Paul reminds them – sternly, but lovingly – that the Lord's Supper is not about asserting yourself, but about receiving Christ.

It is not a meal in which we exalt ourselves, but an act of divine service to us. Christ, the crucified one, comes to serve you with His body and blood. He humbles Himself to the point of death. And in that humility, He calls His people to humble themselves as well.

And that is why Paul calls the Corinthians to examine themselves. Examine themselves individually, to see the sinful motives of their hearts. And examine themselves as a community, to see the divisions that tear them apart. Because coming to the Lord's table without discerning the body – not just the body of Christ in the Sacrament, but the body of Christ in the fellowship of believers – is to eat and drink God's judgment upon you.

The Supper is where Christ serves us. And in serving us, it is where He makes us one. The very same Jesus who washed the disciples' feet and gave Himself on the cross now joins His people together in one body through this meal.

So tonight, we come as those who have been served by Christ. We come with repentance, because we know our sins. We come with humility, because we know what we deserve. And we come with joy, because we know what He gives. He gives His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He gives us His love, His mercy, His presence. And in giving us Himself, He gives us unity with one another.

That's what Maundy Thursday is all about. If you're not aware, the word "Maundy" comes from a Latin word: "mandatum", meaning "commandment." Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you.*" And that's not a generic call to kindness. It is a command to love with the same love that we have received.

A love that bends down to wash dirty feet. A love that serves, that forgives, that overflows in generosity. We love because He first loved us. We serve because we have been served. We forgive because we have been forgiven.

And we do so because Jesus still has everything in His hands. He had the cross in His hands, and He went to it willingly. He had your sins in His hands, and He bore them faithfully. He has the bread and the cup in His hands, and He gives them to you freely. He has you in His hands, past, present, and future, now and forever. Amen.