Maundy Thursday’25

Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough

April 17, 2025

Tonight, Jesus has dinner with his friends. There are a lot of dinners in the Gospel of John. Several days ago, Jesus was given a dinner in his honor at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. In ancient times dinners were very social. There was no eating on the couch or in the car or on the bus. No eating on the run. People ate together to share food and resources. It took a lot of preparation to make dinners in ancient times. Just to make bread-flat bread you had to harvest the wheat, grind it into flour, make the dough, knead the dough and then bake it. Food was made daily because there were no preservatives. Throughout history, dinners were times when people enjoyed the company of others. They shared food, relationships, and information. Eating together had spiritual significance. In Hebrew scripture, we read about banquets in God’s kingdom. Banquets where food is provided so the guests can rest.

That is the scene that we have here tonight. Tonight is a night full of stories and symbolism. We look around. We see the cup with wine and the plate-paten with bread. We see the water to cleanse feet, to bless ourselves, to hydrate us, to give us life. For Jesus and his disciples, it was a dinner. A time to be together. A time to eat. A time to serve and be served.

When Jesus sits down with his friends, we expect to hear the words of communion, “This is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me, etc.” Jesus most likely said the Jewish blessing and broke bread. But in John’s gospel the details are about foot washing. Listen to these details. Jesus removes his robe. He wraps a towel around his waist. He pours water. He washes feet. The details make it clear to us that jesus washed feet in the traditional manner. A servant did not do it for him. Jesus got on his knees and knelt by each disciple. Jesus makes himself vulnerable. He is the teacher, the one they look up to. now he is looking up to them on his knees. Jesus is served at dinner and then he serves. He becomes the servant. Jesus washes feet and then has a serious conversation with the disciples. He will not be with them much longer. You cannot come with me. You can tell others about me by leading and serving as I served you. Jesus is fully human as he washes feet and gives the disciples the news. He is fully human, fully vulnerable.

Every year, we practice foot washing. At some churches they try to control it. They sign up ahead of time. They stand in line next to others they know. Oh, and we make sure our feet are clean. We try to sanitize it. It is so funny and so far removed from what Jesus did because it is not about being comfortable. Its about making yourself vulnerable. Jesus did not have a plan when he did it. He just did it. When we serve others, it is usually inconvenient and not planned. We become vulnerable by building relationships with others that we serve. When *we* are served, we are usually at our most vulnerable.

Foot washing is a personal choice. Whether you wash feet tonight or not, I pray that you reflect on tonight’s symbolism. Reflect on those in our community that are vulnerable. The ones who are always washing our feet. The ones who do not have a choice. They are the ones with few resources and no positions of power. Imagine if they were in these chairs tonight and Jesus washed their feet or if we washed their feet. Sisters and brothers this is what it means to follow Jesus.