



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. LINZI STAHLECKER, CURATE
MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022

EXODUS 12:1-4,11-14; PSALM 116:1,10-17; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; JOHN 13:31-17,31b-35

SERMON FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY 2022

I imagine that Jesus' last supper started out as a pretty intense gathering. The ongoing, long-term stressors of survival under oppressive Imperial rule together with the punishing economic and unjust reality lived and directly experienced by all gathered around that table would surely have taken a toll – each of the disciples, including Judas, and even Jesus, would surely have been feeling the effects of acute and chronic stress.

That night, Jesus and his disciples would have felt the additional stress of anticipating the loss of the one they love the most, the one in whom is all their hope. Relentless, grinding stress, and now stress and grief, it's the kinda stuff you hold in your body, in your muscles, in

your gut. It's the kind of stress that in the long-term harms human health, it's the kind of punishing stress that can even, ultimately, take human life as it still does today.

On that night, on this last night, Jesus sat with his exhausted and weary friends so they might rest together, eat together, be together. Perhaps in response their heightened anxiety, this tension and their fear, Jesus chooses a powerful way to show his disciples what love for another person can look like, *he took care of them* as he loved them. Jesus washed their feet, an exquisite act of care, an embodied acknowledgement of the importance of care, especially in the hardest of times ...

unlike food and shelter, no one needs a foot wash for survival.

Acts of care are often overlooked in favor of the purely practical, set aside until first all material needs are met and all injustices eliminated.

But the way we care and the way we are cared for has enormous bearing on the way we are able to live, it has bearing on our capacity to transform our lives in community and in the society we share. It can even prove to be the difference between mere survival and more fully living when beaten down and worn out by unrelenting stress. Courage, creativity, endurance, hope, these can all be reignited by the care and love of another.

Jesus gets down onto the ground so he can gently care for his friends' tired and depleted bodies. He washes their feet...

And with this care, Jesus honors his friend's emotional, spiritual, *and* physical condition. This loving gesture of care and attention was, I think, intended to soothe, and to de-stress.

Through this act of care, Jesus gives us an example of what loving one another can look like and feel like, perhaps what it should look and feel like. Jesus washes his friends' feet and in doing so teaches us the importance of taking actual care of one another.

Jesus isn't taking care of them so they can be productive later on in the service of a life-draining economic system, this act of care is an act of resistance to those demands of this world that would bring us only stress and death.

We resist as we care for one another as we boldly affirm that our love and care for one another has the power to transform, and we affirm this despite, or in spite of, the world's continued demands of us.

I like to think Jesus was inspired by Mary, who in John's Gospel extravagantly poured her fragrant perfume onto his feet, before wiping them with her hair, I like to think Jesus was so moved, so affected by the care she took of him, as he felt the balm of her love for him deep in his soul he was able to continue, to carry on to the end.

And on this night, I imagine Jesus washes his friends' feet as a parent might embrace a child to soothe their worry; as a lover might place a hand in the small of their beloved's back as a steadying, reassuring presence, as a friend might make the time to sit with a buddy, even in silence, as a show of solidarity and togetherness.

It's like *this*, I think, that Jesus wants us to love each other, not just *in here*, in our minds where we think we love, he wants us to love **actually**, out in the world, through the ways we take care of one another, I think he wants us to show our love in the way we acknowledge and we care for one another's bodies, for the whole self. It's by the *way* we care that our

neighbor knows, and perhaps more importantly *feels*, that we are bound together in community, a family of care and transformative love.

We Christians are called to follow this example of Jesus, to follow the way he cared for his friends, and to live in such a way that shows the world that we know that all people, all life needs love, and all people, all life needs our care. And by this, Jesus says, by the ways we **show** our love to our neighbor, *and*, just as importantly, by the ways our love **is known and felt** by those around us, by the world around us, by all this, Jesus says, everyone will know that we are his disciples.

John 13:1-17,31b-35 *[Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call*

me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”]



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