

WELCOME 31st March 2024 – Maundy Thursday '24 B

John 13:1-17

40 days ago we heard a thundering word from God: “**You** are dust & to dust you shall return.” We acknowledged ourselves as a sinful humanity accountable ^{b/4} a holy God, guilty as charged & justly condemned. Tonight we hear a striking contrast, *Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world & return to his Father...Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything & that he had come from God & would return to **God**. Jesus knew...betrayal, suffering, abandonment & death lay ahead. Jesus knew...the Father would open the grave & welcome him back to eternal glory... **AND** that he would gather us in that triumph.*

So *he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, & poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.*

From stable to cross to triumph...from wrath to forgiveness to reign...This journey from exaltation to execution to eternal life was the plan all along. To save a sin-broken creation God stands ^{w/} us in our flesh, walks ^{w/} us in this life, dies in our place, rises so we will rise too, to serve us forever in the gift of life without end.

The truth is Jesus is the Servant who lives to demonstrate again & again that he is greater than the one who lives in the world... The God of the universe, in the flesh, did not come to be served, but to serve you. To invite you in & serve your deepest need from his basin of grace & table of life.

Let's pray & then we'll sing...*Change My Heart O God*

Lord God,

You sent your Son into the world, & as his hour arrived,
He washed his disciples' feet.

You had given all things into his hands.

He had come from you, and was going to you,

And in that moment, He knelt down on the floor, to wash his friends' feet.

He knew his betrayer, knew who would deny, & all would flee,

Yet he washed their feet & fed them from his body & blood.

Lord God, help us learn from him & do as he has done for us.

The world will know we are his disciples only by our love.

Strengthen our hands for serving & our wills for love.

Shape us into the likeness of your Son,

Who, being God, became a Servant for our sake.

We pray trusting only in his Name...Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY '24 B – THE TRUTH: JESUS IS SERVANT

Sometimes it's just a word...or a few in a text that stop me in **my** tracks...*Jesus knew*...3x here...*Jesus knew*. Before the Passover celebration, **Jesus knew** that his hour had come to leave this world & return to his Father... **Jesus knew** that the Father had given him authority over everything & that he had come from God & would return to **God**. **Jesus knew** who would betray him...3x...*Jesus knew*.

Now...I knew that...I think I did...*Jesus knew*...betrayal, suffering, abandonment & death lay ahead. *Jesus knew*...the Father would open the grave & welcome him back to eternal glory...**AND** that he would gather us in that triumph. Before any of that happened...*Jesus knew*. Over & over again he'd said as much to the 12 & those who were his close companions. Even when he spoke figuratively, "tear down this temple & I'll raise it in 3 days" "the only sign you'll get is the sign of Jonah who was in the belly of the great fish for 3 days," he was pointing toward this moment – hour.

Jesus knew every moment of what was about to transpire... Nothing about the ensuing hours is accident, mistake, or chance. Everything Jesus experiences everything he says, everything he does is part of the Father's plan, & Jesus knew... *Jesus knew his hour had come to leave this world & return to his Father*...From betrayal to brutality to victory...*Jesus knew*. He goes into the events of this night knowing he will eat his final meal w/ his disciples. He knew the betrayer was there & in time arrest, mockery, brutality, death **AND** LIFE to return to the Father. A corpse returns only to dust Jesus knew that the final victory... the ultimate triumph was possible **ONLY AFTER** he had suffered death, was buried, & raised again on the 3rd day. *Jesus knew* his very existence was to fulfill the promise of a servant who would suffer & in his suffering grant healing wholeness satisfaction salvation to all whom God the Father would draw back in faith & trust. (Is 42:1–4; Is 49:1–6; Is 50:4–11; & Is 52:13–53:12)

So Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, & poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. This is what the servant does...Jesus demonstrates he has completely given himself to the greater will of His Father to redeem you & me...to wash a lost & dying human race into the Father's saving mission. Towel, bowl, on his knees, hands wrapped around grubby dirty sinful broken humanity...Even Judas. Jesus knew Judas will trade away for mere coins the greatest gift of love/life humanity will ever know. Jesus gives himself in service to God's loved lost sons & daughters. In Jesus, love will not stay bound to the glories of heaven & the raptures of human imagination but comes from heaven to earth from earth to cross from cross to grave from grave to the Father's throne for you...for me. Love in Jesus serves us...our sin is wiped clean. We are laundered with his blood ...bathed in his sacrifice...swept

into eternity by the tsunami of his serving saving love for us. Jesus clothed himself in our death so we might forever wear his immortality. He laid aside divine status to transform ours. He took on the savagery of our death so we could wear the glory of his life.

The Servant washes you into forgiveness which means your mistakes & mishaps compulsions & harsh selfishness are simply not final. Your sin is never bigger than God's ability to forgive you. Your lostness is never greater than God's power to reclaim you. Your rebellion is never superior to God's sovereign will to redeem you. You are not simply the sum total of all your mistakes/magnificence. Your garbage & your virtues will go to the grave w/ you but the forgiving, gracious life-restoring love of God in Christ will lift you from the grave. And then...

"...since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to **you**." **Go be God's serving saving love everywhere you go**. Go be **ME** to whomever you meet. **NB: JESUS IS NOT SAYING** try & manage a little fondness for the irritating...see if you can kindle some warm feelings toward the unlikable...muster up some niceness for the awkward & unlovely. Jesus says...now as one whom I serve...serve...draw close – touch, bless, cleanse, soothe, heal, restore, lift up, forgive, embrace...like I do for you.

Which feels to me an impossible command. There is no way this human flesh can grow in likeness to Jesus under its own strength...no way this sinner can stand against its inborn sinfulness...can conquer its own selfishness... can become that image in this world...Except his other word tonight is this one...

"**This** is my body, which is given for you...*This cup is the new covenant between God & his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood*..." He draws close to serve even still...to provide his presence & power. He gives peace w/ God & strength for each day. He serves a visible word - bread & wine – his body & his blood to say "I'll serve/love you even when you can't...don't...won't." He gave bread & wine to serve us now in our deepest needs in whatever we face in this world, & then draw us into the world to come. He set a banquet which feeds us not only in this life but is powerful enough to usher us into eternity itself. In towel, basin, bread & wine, Word of promise & assurance... Now & forever...The word & work of the servant is the last word...the final word. God's redemptive work in the world is the final thing. The truth is Jesus is the Servant who lives to demonstrate again/again that he is greater than the one who lives in the world...The God of the universe, in the flesh, did not come to be served, but to serve you. To invite you in & serve your deepest need from his basin of grace & table of life... to serve you forever in the gift of life w/ end. -- Amen