

A Part with Christ

Maundy Thursday – 04/01/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: John 13:1–17 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8, **“Jesus answered [Peter], ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me’.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ Tonight, on Maundy Thursday, in almost all Roman Catholic parishes and many evangelical churches, an unusual ritual is traditionally practiced. It is a foot washing ceremony.
 - ➔ I say that it’s unusual for two reasons: first, people’s feet are hardly dirty when they come to church these days – maybe stinky, but not dirty. Our custom here of wearing socks and shoes generally keeps dirt out but odor in. Maybe Western churches ought to adopt a foot-perfuming ritual instead.
 - ➔ But the second reason this custom is unusual in Maundy Thursday liturgies is that Jesus did it as a one-time service. He never said that He intended it to be repeated often as He did the Lord’s Supper.
- ⊗ Paul tells us what things are necessary for the Supper in tonight’s First Reading from 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me’. In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”
 - ➔ So, not only do we lack the need for foot washing, but we also lack Jesus’ command to do so.

I. Who had part with Christ that last night?

- ⊗ But understand folks, when Jesus did kneel to wash the feet of His twelve apostles in Jerusalem on the Thursday evening before His crucifixion, He was not doing something strange or unusual.
 - ➔ In ancient times slaves always had to wash the dusty, dirty feet of those who came into their masters’ houses. When Abraham was visited by a holy trio near Mamre, he urged that water be brought to wash their soiled feet (Gen. 18:4). In Luke 7, Jesus criticizes Simon the Pharisee for his lack of social custom and love. You see, when Jesus entered Simon’s house, He was not afforded the simplest display of love – having His feet washed (Lk 7:36–50). That task was left to an unannounced visitor – a prostitute! And she did it with her hair and her tears!
 - ➔ Washing the feet of another in that sandal-wearing culture who walked most everywhere was not just for cleanliness, but it was a sign of respect, love, and servanthood.
- ⊗ When Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, He did something intimately connected to who He was. We know that God is love. Therefore, Jesus, as the Son of God is love; the One who came to seek and save the lost.
 - ➔ Saving others is the ultimate act of serving, not being served. Jesus said in Mark 10:45, “for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”.
 - ➔ This love of Jesus was displayed and fulfilled greatest at the cross, though He showed it in countless other ways: obedience to His parents, Joseph and Mary; teaching His disciples not to

reject those who preached in His name; when Jesus cried at the death of Lazarus; rebuking His disciples for not letting parents bring their children to Him. These were all physical signs of Jesus' love. And now, when Jesus washes the feet of His disciples, even the feet of Judas, the traitor, He expresses His deep love for them all.

✘ So, should foot washing continue today? Is it really a sign of servanthood and love among us? Did Jesus want a patent-leather-shoed, nylon-stockinged culture to practice foot washing? Well, He did say, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:14). Should we be washing each other's feet tonight, or was Jesus using a custom of His day as one example of how He meant believers to serve in His day?

→ It's always important for us to remember the context. Jesus is only with His apostles. Each one of them would see the Son of God, the Christ, stoop and do the servant's task. But which of them do you suppose would have volunteered had Jesus asked, "Would one of you please gird yourself and wash our feet before supper?" Or would an argument break out? "That's not our place. Where's the manservant? The maidservant?"

✘ How significant that we hear of Jesus stooping...and washing. He is rabbi. He is Lord. No one expresses any doubts until Peter, incredulously says, "You, Lord?" "Do you wash my feet?" Jesus can only give Peter this counsel: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (Jn. 13:7).

→ Yet Peter doesn't see a need to wait for understanding. He thinks he knows now. "Never!" Peter cries. Never will Jesus wash Peter's feet, not even in eternity. At least that's what Peter thinks. But a few seconds later, Peter has totally changed his mind, after Jesus said to him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me" (v. 8).

→ What? No part? Peter reverses himself. "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (v 9). As is his tendency Peter goes too far in the opposite direction. He's already in Christ. He's already clean. He has already been baptized.

✘ But, just as feet had to be washed daily from the dust and dirt, so, it is that the one who walks in Christ needs a daily cleansing from the dirt of sin. That's daily confession and daily absolution.

→ And where does a believer go to receive the ability to drink of God's gift of daily repentance and absolution from sin? Yes, it's Baptism. We Lutherans believe, teach, and confess the Biblical connection between Holy Confession, Absolution and Holy Baptism. Luther wrote in his Large Catechism, "Repentance, therefore, is nothing other than a return and approach to Baptism" (LC IV 79).

II. Who has part with Christ in these last days?

✘ So friends, have you been baptized? Yes? Then you have a part with Christ. You are buried with Him and raised with Him in that holy washing of grace. Never forget or take for granted that washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Instead, draw near to God in the assurance of your baptism with a pure confession of sin, having your hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and your bodies washed with pure water.

→ In that miracle of life, hold fast the confession of your hope in Jesus Christ as man's only Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil without wavering.

→ Look in the mirror and remind yourself daily of how the old sinful man inside of you needs to be drowned in your baptism. Luther actually encouraged that we use visual aids. For example, you could put a crucifix and your baptismal certificate above your bed to remind you that Christ is in you and you in Christ.

- ⊗ These items also help to show how seriously God considers sin. He not only loved the world, but He loved you enough to send His one and only Son into the flesh. Why? To ultimately spend hours hanging on a cross; to endure a painful and bloody death. Yes, Jesus did that for you. Your sins are the reason why God took that action, because Jesus has a part with you.
 - ➔ When you were baptized into Christ's name, you became a part with Christ from that time forward. God's name is on you; the name that is above every other name.
 - ➔ Your sin became His sin, and in exchange His purity has now become yours. You have a part with Christ.
- ⊗ But the connection doesn't end there in baptism. As we see on this night, our Lord made for us another deep connection.
 - ➔ On Calvary, Jesus offered His very own body and blood to be shed and given for the forgiveness of all sin. And to help us remember that forevermore, He gave us a precious gift, with visual aids that we can see and touch and taste, to bring home the certainty that you/we have a part with Christ.
 - ➔ It is ordinary bread and wine, that He connects to His Words and the faithful administration and receiving of it within His Church, which is then also His true body and blood; the same body and the blood that He gave and shed on the cross for the forgiveness of all sin. This truly is a holy meal instituted on a holy day for you and me.
 - ➔ It is far from ordinary in any way. This eating and drinking is not what many churches have made it out to be; some kind of symbolic, spiritual love that gives you a weekly spiritual high. No, this about so much more than just our spiritual feelings.
- ⊗ For Christ promised on this night when He instituted His Supper that in His body and blood He actually gives you and me His gift of forgiveness.
 - ➔ This is a very real "common union" with Christ Himself, to strengthen you for the daily struggles of living as a believer of Christ in this sin-soaked world. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" You see, He makes Himself a part with you; as John 15:5 says, you are living branches of the One living vine. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. ...for apart from Me you can do nothing".

Conclusion

- ⊗ On this night, Jesus washed feet to show His love; to express His servant heart that would soon take Him to His greater act of love and cleansing – giving His body and shedding His blood on the cross to wash souls and cleanse them to be free of all sin.
 - ➔ And then He gave His Church the means by which we now receive that forgiveness – the washing and regeneration of Baptism, and the Holy Supper of His body and blood. These are the two activities that He did attach together with commands; "Go and make disciples...baptizing..." (Mat. 28:19), and "Do this...in remembrance of Me" (1Cor. 11:25).
 - ➔ In these means He serves us with His eternal grace; He cleanses us with the benefits He earned in His death and resurrection; He makes us a part with Him forever; He shows us His love every day; every week in worship.
- ⊗ And now in love, He gives us a new command, "just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (v. 34).

→ How do you and I do that today, in this culture; in this unique 21st century world? How do we display Christ's servant love? Washing feet is probably not as likely to be the answer today, is it? But feeding those who are hungry, serving a neighbor who is in need, cleaning up his/her yard, picking up groceries for them, visiting someone who is lonely, babysitting for a worn out parent. The possibilities are endless. Why do these things?

✘ Because of the love Christ has already shown to you. Romans 5:8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us". That's love that is so much more than a feeling or emotion. The cross, the blood, the pain of Jesus; those are concrete signs of His love. And in a moment He will feed you with His love as you eat His body and drink His blood. Yes, you dear Christian – you have a Part with Christ. Amen.