

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

Paint a picture in your mind.

In this picture, you should see Jesus, in the center, dressed like a servant, wearing only his full length plain white under clothes and a towel, stooped down washing the feet of Peter.

Jesus' hands hold Peter's dripping wet foot. Jesus' face is joyful but turned slightly away looking at the task of washing Peter's foot.

Peter is looking at Jesus with an expression of shock and yet joy on his face. The remainder of the twelve disciples are surrounding the two of them, fixated on what Jesus is doing. All of them with faces that show they are trying to fathom the reason why their Teacher and Lord would do this.

On this Maundy Thursday, we will be focusing on this image. On this image, of Christ washing the feet of His disciples. And Through this image, we will see how God's will drives us to love one another in joyful service.

[Focus 1: the back of Jesus]

First, let's focus on the back of Jesus as He stoops to serve.

While sitting on his knees, Jesus' back is bent in submission. He has stripped off his outer garment and taken the posture of a slave. You can see the smooth curve of His back, tight against the white under clothes. It's almost like you can see the line of muscle under the skin.

The skin that will soon enough be torn by the sharp, metal barbs of a Roman scourge and the rough, wooden splinters of a Roman cross.

On that cross and in this picture, Jesus serves in obedience to the Father. In fact, He serves in such joyful submissiveness that it invites our obedience.

Through Jesus' actions, through His deeds of service, we can almost hear Him saying, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to

wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15). "Just 'as I have loved you, you also are to love one another' (Jn 13:34). Trust my words and deeds. Love like I love, for I lay down my life for all people."

[Our backs]

Have Jesus' words and deeds of love impacted your life? What does your back look like? Is your back bent and stooped over in the service of love to your neighbor?

Look at the people in your life, can you see Christ serving through each of them?

Look at a mother who stoops to kiss the knee of a child.

Look at an adult, bent down to wipe food from the chin of an aging parent.

Look at the back of a prayer warrior, bent over carrying the burden of grief in prayer on behalf of a friend.

Look at the beautiful and vulnerable back of the servant, stooped in obedient service, for the sake of another.

Look and see how the stooped back of Christ, doing God's will, drives us to love one another in joyful service.

[Focus 2: the hands of Jesus holding Peter's foot]

As you look at the picture of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, move your focus, now, from Jesus' back to Jesus' hands.

Can you see how Jesus holds Peter's dripping foot over the water.

Notice the details, the tenderness in Jesus' hands as He massages the water into Peter's dusty foot.

The tension in Peter's foot as he, in bewilderment, allows the great I am to do the task of a lowly slave.

The crystal-clear water as it cleanses the dirt from Peter.

Notice the personal, human contact that tenderly binds these two figures together.

In tenderness, Jesus calls us to love. He invites us into obedience but doesn't leave us on our own to figure it out. In fact, He explicitly tells his followers: "apart from me, you can do nothing." This point of connection between Jesus and Peter is not just central to this image, it's central to the life of a disciple. There, in the water, Jesus is the vine and Peter is living out what it means to be a branch. **Jesus is active.** Peter is dependent.

The command to serve and love in a self-giving way is empowered by the self-giving act of this vine, who gives himself again to this branch by means of the water.

[*Our hands*]

How has this active forgiveness and love of Jesus in your life caused your hands to give love to your neighbor?

Look at a husband, who wrings his hands in sorrow, while he leans on his dependence of Jesus in order to ask for forgiveness from his wife.

Look at a high school senior, with hands folded in prayer, while he or she daily remembers their baptism and experiences again that intimate connection with the vine that allows the branch to bear fruit.

Look at the hands of our ladies as they lovingly tie quilts to give to the Lutheran World Relief.

Look and see how the hands of Christ, doing God's will, drives us to love one another in joyful service.

[*Focus 3: the face of joy*]

Now, again, as you picture the image of Christ washing the feet of Peter. Move your focus to the faces. Focus on the face of Peter and the face of Christ.

Peter's face shows shock and joy, as he stares dumbfounded at Christ's hands on his feet. Peter's face is set in a mixture of confusion and awe as he observes Jesus' act of servitude.

Look at Jesus. His face is turned slightly away and hidden from full view, but if we could see the face of Jesus that Peter sees, we might share his look of confusion and awe. For there on His knees, His back bared in preparation for the scourge and cross, as He holds a dirty disciple's dirty foot, the face of Jesus shines with joy.

Jesus serves in joy as He points His disciples to obedience. Jesus points His followers to dependence on Him. Jesus asks that those who would live as His friends would join in the same kind of humble love that joyfully gives yourself away for others.

And Jesus says there is a purpose behind the command.

A purpose behind the dependence.

A result of giving yourself away. A result of joy.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). If you could see the face that is hidden in this act of service, you would see joy on the face of Jesus.

[Our faces]

Has your own face shined with joy while in an act of service? Have you seen joy on the face of your brother or sister in Christ as they served their neighbor?

Just look at the joyful face of a parent as they tickle and play with their baby while changing his diaper.

Just look at the joyful face of a nurse as she encourages and motivates her patient while he does physical therapy.

Just look at the joyful faces of the youth and mission teams as they return and talk about what they got to experience.

Look and see how the joyful face of Christ, doing God’s will, drives us to love one another in joyful service.

[Conclusion]

Return now to the picture as a whole. Notice the beautiful and vulnerable back of the servant, bent in obedient service, for the sake of another. Notice the intimate connection between Jesus’ hands and Peter’s foot. The vine that will allow the branch to bear fruit. Imagine the joy on the face of Jesus, the joy He shares with you, the joy that comes from obedience, dependence, and giving yourself away.

Even when you fail to serve Joyfully as Christ served, your service still benefits your neighbor. Don’t stop serving because you feel negative about your service. Instead, let God’s will be done. Ask God to forgive your sinful heart and He will restore your life and give you salvation. Jesus doesn’t serve to make us feel ashamed about ourselves. Instead, He serves because only **His** act of sacrifice is able to save us.

You are forgiven. You are restored anew. Now look to Christ. On this Maundy Thursday, Christ gives you the example of what it means to be a servant. The Father gave all things into Jesus’ hands. And Jesus conquered sin by serving you to the point of death on the cross. His death has paid the price of your sin and furthermore, it has empowered you to follow His command. The command to love one another just as He loved you. (Jn 13:34)

Look and see how God’s will drives you to love one another in joyful service. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
