

Emmanuel Lutheran in Lancaster, Pa. Rev. Timothy W. Sadler

SERMON: based on John 13: 1 – 17; 31b-35

Maundy Thursday, April 17th, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we come to this terrible night that marks the beginning of the end of Christ's journey to the Cross, we look over the shoulder of Scripture into the Last Supper that Jesus shares with his closest friends.

Jesus knows how this unfolding drama will end, but He doesn't run and hide, he doesn't shake his fist at God and yell "this is unfair."

With everything hanging over His head, what Jesus wants more; than anything is to show His friends how much He loves them. And He wants them to understand how much the world needs that loved lived out, in and through everything they do.

So, He takes a towel and stoops to do the lowest task the lowliest servant should have performed; He washes His disciple's feet; those who by right should have been honoring Him and washing His feet.

These final hours of Jesus' life are told with poignant detail. In the deepening shadow of His coming death, Jesus' love for His people and this world is made so real, it's almost more than we can bear. All we can do is open our hearts and receive it, this love beyond all loves.

Many people in this world find it hard to live in the present time. Always looking ahead to what might be. They believe that if life would change, or other people would change, they could be a better person.

They think when such and such happens, then I'll be okay and then I'll live my life the way I know I should. I'll be kinder, happier, be more the person God created me to be. I just need to get through this first—whatever "this" is.

Jesus, though, doesn't support such an outlook. Jesus knows events in His own life are only getting worse. And He knows the world isn't going to heal itself.

Jesus for sees not only the destruction of His beloved city Jerusalem; He also sees a world full of cruelty, violence, and conflict.

For Jesus, there are no happy endings in THIS world—no magic moments when everything will be okay. Jesus knows He needs to live His life for God in the midst of life as it really is, and not wait for some imagined happening in the future.

The purpose of everything that tests us in this life is to help us grow stronger through it, not just bide our time until the testing passes.

Jesus also understands He isn't in the world to solve all the world's problems before the end of time. Jesus understands His mission is much larger than that, and rather than fixing all the problems we have here, Jesus decides to remain faithful to his mission at all costs.

And His faithfulness brought the greatest healing of all into this world.

Through the washing of the disciple's feet, Jesus showed them what it means to make God's love real in this imperfect world. The Christian faith isn't some high-up-in-the-sky...religion unconcerned with the reality of life.

Jesus was incarnate; He had a real body made of flesh. Jesus had human hands that washed real dirt off of human feet

We're called to be that real in our own faith. We must be washers of feet; we must be grace givers. We must make the love of Christ real—incarnate—in this world. We are the means by which God gives His world and his love flesh in the world.

Without real people living out the love of God, God's love is just some concept floating around in the air but never touching the hurt of this world.

There may be no happy endings in this world until God makes all things new, but Jesus gives us a way to live in the world so that, together, we make our time here on earth bear tremendous fruit; "Just as I have loved you, 'Jesus says', you also should love one another."

Jesus gives us the only foundation on which to build our love for one another and that foundation is His love for us. Our love isn't to be based on our tolerance level, on our patience, or on our willingness to forgive. Our love for each other is to be based on Christ's love for us.

"As I have loved you..."

It's not enough that we love only those who love us back.

It's not enough that we love people only when they treat us well.

It's not enough that we love only those who are like us and with whom we feel comfortable.

It's not enough that we only live out the love of Christ when our own lives are going well.

When we love one another like Jesus loves us, we are witnesses for Christ in this world. We ARE Christ to the world. When our love for one another is the natural outcome of the love Christ has for us, it carries with it a strength and integrity not all the darkness of the world can overcome.

In the washing of the disciple's feet, Jesus is ushering them into the mystery of God's righteous rule....

A rule that's made perfect only when it's lived out perfectly in mercy.

The body and blood of Christ are broken and shed "for you." The Messiah who washes the disciples' feet is about to be lifted up to reign from a Cross.

Jesus knows that this is the time to wash the disciples' feet, and this is the moment to teach them—because right now—nothing is happening that is more important in this world...

Then God's care and love for these mere human beings. No one is more important in the Kingdom of God than the ones who need the love and care of Jesus.

The Good News is that Jesus so willingly gives His love and care, in every way possible. Jesus holds nothing back from us, not even His life. It will take the darkness of His suffering and death to usher in the Kingdom of God.

This is the revelation of Holy Week. This is the mystery of the Cross.
AMEN.