

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

April 1, 2010

Rev. Bob Garrard

Maundy Thursday Worship Theme: And You Are Clean,

Exodus 12: 1-14, John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

If you knew you had twenty-four hours to live, who would you spend them with and how would you spend them? How might you feel about this end of life situation, and what last thoughts or gifts would you leave to those closest to you? Unfortunately, we do not have time tonight to contemplate such deep and emotional questions in any detail for ourselves, but they may well apply to Jesus in the last twenty-four hours he had before he committed his spirit to his father as he died on the cross. Maybe we can learn what we might do by following Jesus through what he did.

Jesus gathered his twelve closest disciples, including Judas, who would betray him, in an upper room in Jerusalem. It must have been a large room where these 13 men sat or rather lounged on separate small chaise lounge type couches around a large table. The occasion was the celebration of the traditional Passover or Seder meal as described in the Exodus passage we read tonight. This special night was prescribed some 1300 years before by God to the Hebrews while they were still enslaved in Egypt. Jesus had picked an intimate setting and familiar meal that was one of great comfort and deep theological meaning to be his last supper with his closest friends. It was a meal celebrating God's liberating the Hebrews from the Egyptian Pharaoh's evil grasp. It was also a meal of remembrance of Yahweh's victory over the god's of Egypt.

Now Jesus' friends should have known that this might be one of their last meals with him. He had given them plenty of warnings, but my sense of the disciples from the scriptures is that the only one who might have fully realized this was the last meal was Judas. He was part of the scribe's and Pharisee's plan to make sure this was Jesus' last supper. Of course, the other disciples may have been in a state of denial. Besides, Jesus was so alive, so in charge as he lead them in the familiar Passover meal. What could be wrong? His warnings of his suffering and death...were something that might happen in some distant future or not at all, so they may have hoped, as we might hope in a similar situation.

Jesus, most likely sensing the fulfillment of his mission on earth, suddenly broke the flow of the traditional litany and meal with the words now so familiar to the Christian church. These words reflect the truth of what was going to occur and contained a message from God about what this meal and night really meant. Biblical scholars guess that at the third of the four cups of wine shared in the Passover meal, Jesus might have stood up and as Matthew wrote, "Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'"

Like the greatly valued lambs in the first Passover in Exodus, whose bodies were sacrificed and whose blood was shed to protect God's people from the angel of death in Egypt; Jesus became "The Sacrificial Lamb of God" whose body and blood protected the disciples and you and me from the angel of sin and death. In the breaking of the bread, and in sharing the cup of wine of the new covenant, Jesus promised the forgiveness of our sins. Sins washed away as he poured out his blood for many on the cross. What an everlasting gift and last words these were to share with his closest friends, then, and his closest friends tonight.

Yet, according to John, Jesus was not done with his last words and gifts. Also during the supper, maybe closer to the end of it, "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."

The disciples already shaken by the out of the ordinary words and acts of Jesus in the Passover meal, must have been stunned by their Master taking the role of the lowest servant to do the menial task of washing their dirty feet. I think the dialogue with Peter reflects the confusion very well. "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..."

Again, Jesus sacrificed himself to clean up the lives of his disciples. Yes, he even washed the feet of Judas. People of that day who wore open sandals must have had very dirty feet. Like the way sin pollutes everything, the dust, grit and grime of daily life in Palestine would settle to the roads and cling to the very inner toes of those who walked there. And only the Master in the role of the lowest servant could clean these feet so they were purified.

But from what Jesus said and did more than just feet were cleansed. From masseurs I have learned and experienced that the soles of our feet are like the exit avenues for the stresses and poisons our bodies and minds store up. After a back surgery in the 1990's and at the same time in the midst of a very difficult time in a church I served as an associate, a masseuse rubbed my feet and I felt the pains and tensions of my life flow out of me like the bottoms of my feet were the drains on a tub. When Jesus washed the disciple's feet, maybe he help them to drain out, even for a moment, the tensions and fears of that night, and the pent up guilt of their sins. Is this not what the Master acting as the lowest servant does for us today, if we will but allow him to touch and wash our feet which may be entry ways to our souls? If we will but do this, let us hear his words to us, "And you are clean..."

After this Jesus, put his robe back on, sat back at the table and told the disciples words that echo 2000 years into our ears; "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.”

Then on that night of all nights Jesus poured out one more gift that summed up what he had been saying and doing throughout the Last Supper and foot washing. It summed up what he was about to go through for those men and for you and me. It summed up his whole life amongst those first century Jews and Gentiles. It sums up his life in the Spirit with us today. “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.”

If you knew you had twenty-four hours to live, who would you spend them with and how would you spend them? How might you feel about this end of life situation, and what last thoughts or gifts would you leave to those closest to you? Jesus set the example of what we need to do, not just in our last 24 hours, but in every second of our lives from now on.

The Master has invited us to his table. Let us prepare to join him and hear him tell us that through the cleansing action of his broken body, and shed blood, “You are clean...”