

Sermon 2011 Maundy Thursday
April 21, 2011
Text: John 13:1-20
Theme: "Sloshing Water"

(Pouring water into the font)

The sound of water evokes different imagery for each of us. For a water rich society like us, it probably means something different from what it means to a person from drought stricken Africa. We think of hiking by lush waterfalls and fishing in flowing rivers. They probably think of what we would call mud holes that give them life. But nevertheless, the sound evokes imagery.

(Pouring water into the font)

On the night in which he was betrayed our Lord gathered his friends and family around him to celebrate the Passover. Nothing unusual here. This is what every rabbi in town was doing. All the people were arriving at the rabbi's homes and taking off their outer cloaks, slipping off their sandals and washing their dirty feet in a basin by the door. The wealthiest rabbi's had Gentile slaves to wash their guests' feet for them. Even if a Jew were a slave, it was not permitted for any Jew to wash another Jew's feet because it was such a lowly, humiliating task. That is what John the Baptist meant when he said he was not worthy to loosen the thong of Jesus' sandals, much less wash his feet.

So Jesus' friends and family came to Passover. The roads were dusty and their feet were dirty from walking but guess what? No water! No one to wash their dirty, tired feet and no water. Did they notice? Of course they noticed. A basin of water for your feet was as common then as indoor plumbing is today. It was always there – just expected – but in this borrowed room...no water and no servant to wash feet.

Apparently everyone just quietly ignored the matter. They were all just like kids who can ignore a 6 foot high pile of laundry in the middle of the living room floor. Hey! Whose clothes are these? I dunno, not mine, mine either. So, while the disciples were bickering about who was the greatest among them, Jesus went and got some water, put a towel around his waist and began washing feet.

(Pouring water into the font)

Peter was horrified, but he was told, "Peter, unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Then Peter wanted a complete bath. Right idea, but unnecessary. The water with which Jesus washes cleanses us in a most remarkable way. No Peter, you don't need to get more clean with more water. And you don't get to be the cleanest disciple. Everyone is completely cleansed with this water.

The disciples were all caught up with who was the greatest among them and who would be at Jesus' left and who would be at his right in his kingdom. And here he was kneeling among them and washing their feet.

(Pouring water into the font)

The disciples wanted an earthly king who would rule the Jews, throw Rome out of Israel and restore them to the grandeur of King David. They wanted pomp and circumstance. They wanted might and wealth and here was their king, kneeling among them and washing their feet.

(Pouring water into the font)

And so here we are tonight. We have sadness that we want God to heal. We have financial burdens that we want God to bear. We accuse God and get angry with God and choose to do things our own way because his way is culturally bound, old fashioned and just doesn't work in the 21st century. We know better. And here in our midst, our king kneels beside us and washes us, but not just our feet and not just with any water.

(Pouring water into the font)

For Jesus, it all has to do with love. Everything comes down to love. Our love for God and our love for one another. He knew we would never be able to love him or one another without his help. He knew that we would never have faith to believe that he is greater than any earthly king. The sin in our lives builds up on us and blinds us. The sin all around us weakens us. We are foul people living in a foul world just like those dirty rotten disciples who were more concerned with being first and not being the servant who washes feet than they were about their Lord who had donned a towel and begun the work of the lowest servant in the household. We are dirty. So he washes us. He washes us with the waters of Holy Baptism with water that never stops flowing and then, because we are clean, our feet and everything else, he invites us to dinner.

The washing and the dining go together. If you have been washed by the Lord, you are welcome to the banquet of his body and blood. I wish we had a moat all around the altar for a Baptismal font so that every Sunday we would have to cross through water to get to the Supper. Imagine everyone taking off their shoes and socks and wading through that Baptismal font to come to the supper! What amazing imagery that would be huh? But, for now, this will have to do. As you come forward, remember the water that was poured over you from this font or one like it – the water that washes you moment by moment. Remember Jesus' command to love God and love one another and feast on his very body and blood to empower you to do exactly as he commands for Jesus never tells you to do anything unless he gives you the strength to do it.

Tonight we pause with Jesus before he goes to the cross where he will pay for our sins with his life and soul. Tonight we are washed and fed in preparation for the celebration of the most important event of our lives. On Good Friday, our sins were paid for. Early on the first day of the week, he proved that we were free and that death could not hold him, so it cannot hold us either. Tonight we remember that. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.