

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Maundy Thursday – March 28, 2024**  
**John 13:1-15 – Love One Another**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Tonight, on the night he was betrayed, our Lord instituted his holy Supper. “Do this in remembrance of me,” he said, as he served us with his word and sacrament. So this night, we eat and drink his body and blood, proclaiming his death until he comes again.

At this altar, heaven is here on earth. At this altar, we kneel in the presence of the living God. With Moses and Aaron and the chief men of Israel, we behold God, we eat and drink the meal he serves. And he does not lay his hand upon us, he forgives all our sin.

Therefore our hymns and prayers tonight proclaim his supper, his last will and testament. For his words of institution are spoken in earnest, truthful and clear. There can be no metaphor in a last will and testament. The bread, he says clearly, “This bread is my body, given for you.” And the cup, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

But how strange it seems, if the theme of Maundy Thursday is the Lord's Supper, that our reading tonight from John's gospel does not include the words of institution. In fact, the words of institution do not appear in John's gospel at all. Instead, John tells us what our Lord did and said after supper: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

Why did he wash their feet? What does the footwashing mean? And what does it have to do with communion?

The disciples did not understand at first, but afterwards they understood. And we understand too, by faith. The answer is simple. Do not overthink it. He explained it clearly himself.

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.”

By washing his disciples' feet, our master is doing the work of a servant, a slave. He's saying, “I am your servant, I have come to be your slave. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. I came to serve you; let me do it. And if you are my disciples, love and serve one another as I have loved you.”

“Let me serve you,” says Jesus. “Let me be your slave. Let me wash you clean in baptism. Let me pour out my blood for you to drink. Let me deliver up my body into death for you to eat.”

So although John does not mention the words of institution, although he skips over the supper itself, he does show us the footwashing. And the footwashing teaches what the supper means. When we come before the altar and kneel and receive the body and blood of God under the bread and wine, our crucified Savior is being our servant, our host. We are beggars, but he feeds us. We are filthy, but he washes us clean. We should be his slaves, but he is ours. We are unworthy even to untie his sandals, but he washes our feet. He takes our place on the cross and pays for us the penalty we could never pay.

This is the reality of what happens at the baptism font. Our Savior washes filthy wretches clean. He serves us. And this is the reality of what happens at the communion rail. Our Savior feeds starving sinners to the full. He serves us.

“Nothing have I, Christ, to offer, you alone my highest good. Nothing have I, Lord, to proffer, but your crimson colored blood.” We have nothing to offer him. Be he offers all he has to purchase us.

He offers his crimson blood, to pay our bride price and join us to himself, the bridegroom. He loves us and gives himself for us.

Therefore, just as many grains of wheat are joined together in one loaf, and many grapes are joined in one cup, Christ unites us all together in this one baptism and one communion of the saints. And so, just as nothing in all creation will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, let nothing separate or divide the one church that Christ has made. Love one another, for we are one in Christ Jesus.

Dear saints, you are washed in the crimson blood, you drink the blood he serves, you are cleansed by his words of absolution. You who live in his love, do you understand his example? Do you see what you're called to do? "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Because your master has become your servant, because he washes your filthy sin away each week in his words of absolution, because he feeds you each week with his true body and blood, you also should do for each other according to his example. He loved you to the end, now love one another.

Love one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Forgive as you have been forgiven. Forget your grievances, put your pride away. Remember what your master has done for you, and eagerly seek to serve each other. Outdo one another in showing honor.

And what God has joined together in this church, let not man separate. Let no grudges or covetousness or backbiting divide us. Build one another up in the most holy faith. Lay down your lives for one another, as Christ laid down his life for you. Care for your weaker brothers, visit the sick, pray for the suffering, give to the poor, and speak well of one another at all times.

These things John teaches us again and again in his first epistle: Love one another.

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

"Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Beloved in the Lord, let us love one another, and share in this one bread and one cup, the communion that he serves us, to bind us together. Let us love one another, in thanksgiving for the love he has shown us, so all may know we are his disciples. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.