

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
April 2, 2026- Maundy Thursday
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1, 10-17; 1 Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“I am among you as one who serves.” (Luke 22.27) †

Tonight, we celebrate the Lord’s last night at supper with his disciples, when he demonstrated to them what it means to be a servant and what it means to love. That quote I just read, comes from the parallel story of the last supper, in the Gospel of Luke instead of John. It’s Jesus’ response to his disciples’ dispute among themselves, over which of them is the greatest and most important. His response is clear: ‘I am among you as one who serves.’ This was demonstrated by Jesus, from his birth as one of us and baptism, through his teaching and healing, to the ‘messy stuff’ we don’t like to think about— his suffering, the broken body, and the blood— and, oddly enough, the towel and the basin. Tonight, Maundy Thursday, Jesus ‘lays it all on the line.’ In a rather shocking yet very clear way, he lays it on the line.

Jesus said, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ The washing of the disciples’ feet was an extraordinary act; unexpected and uncomfortable. The washing of one’s feet is very personal. People in those days wore sandals (if anything) and their feet were covered with dirt and dust from the road, layered in muck from streets. Even in households of wealthy people, it was rare for slaves to wash the feet of their masters; it was a very menial thing; something one did for oneself. In a society based on hierarchy, Jesus’ act seemed inappropriate to his disciples. He was their leader, their teacher, and it was scandalous by their standards (hence Peter’s strong reaction). It’s easy to say we would be different... Peter, like many of us, lived in a society fixated on power and authority. His agenda was the world’s agenda, and he objected in the same way many of us do, when someone’s actions don’t meet our expectations. Jesus’ act of washing his disciples’ feet seemed degrading; but it wasn’t about self-humiliation, it was about beginning the transformation of a sinful, selfish world—one based on power and control— into a kingdom of vulnerability and of love. ‘Do you know what I have done?’ Do you understand?

Another unexpected aspect of John’s Gospel is the strange understanding of glory and glorification. Its author speaks of ‘glory’ as soon as Judas leaves to betray Jesus. In fact, this Gospel insists that the foot washing (and even the betrayal) are somehow part of Jesus’ glorification. For immediately after this event Jesus proclaims, “Now the Son of Man has been

glorified...God has been glorified in him and will glorify him at once.” How odd to assert that menial service and the humiliation to come are somehow glorifying! The point is that God is glorified in many ways, even ways that may appear to us to be hopeless and wrong; for God and God’s love transcends everything. Jesus never denies his superiority. He doesn’t hide the differences of nature and grace between he and the disciples. “You call me teacher and Lord... and you are right, for that is what I am” (13.13). Jesus doesn’t deny his authority, he *transcends* it. Jesus washed the feet of his followers, including Judas, and profoundly changed his relationship with them. He showed them true love, and he also made them uncomfortable... and so often, isn’t that what love does?

Jesus changed the relationship he had with his disciples. His love transformed what might have been a degrading act into one of affection and friendship. His simple act on that last night with his disciples, taught them that they were equals, called into a mutual loving relationship with each other. His command, his *mandatum* (from which we get the term ‘Maundy’ Thursday) is simple: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Not one of you is greater than the other, not one of you is better than another. I have come as one who serves, who gives, to show you that all are equal in the eyes of God— poor refugees and rich businessmen, those with dark skin and those with light skin, gays and straights, Democrats and Republicans, those in power and those who are most vulnerable. *All* are equal in the eyes of God!

He loved his disciples and loved them to the end. For immediately after this intimate gathering, there followed a rapid sequence of events— the transition from cheering crowds to jeering crowds, from praise to mocking, from intimacy to suffering and horror. Try to imagine how you may have felt as one of Jesus’ followers on that night. Imagine how their world was torn apart; how everything turned dark when he was taken from them. At the end of this evening’s service, we’ll experience this symbolically, as we strip the altar of all color and decoration, darken our sanctuary, and leave in silence. Leaving it appearing dark, harsh, and uncomfortable. Not to make us sad, but to remind us: God is glorified in many ways, even ways that appear wrong to us, for God’s love transcends everything. ‘Do you know what I have done?’

Tonight, ‘God lays it on the line’ — The prevailing forces are rejected, power and privilege are subdued, dominion is replaced by equality, and love and humility are shown to be the mark of true discipleship! ‘Do you know what I have done?’ ‘Do you understand? I have shown you love! His followers were told on that night, and we are told tonight— ‘They will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another’ (13.34). Tonight, our God ‘lays it on the line,’ and commands each of us to do the same. †