

**Maundy Thursday  
St. Anne's Episcopal Church  
Lee's Summit, Missouri**

**John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

*In the name of the one holy and undivided trinity, one God. AMEN.*

Have you ever played one of those games where you were asked a question like, "If you could have dinner and spend the evening with anyone, who would it be?" It is an intriguing question, isn't it?

Now, since I'm a priest, you might guess that some biblical characters would be among the folks I'd like to spend an evening with. And, you'd be right about that. In fact, it would be hard for me to narrow the list down only to one.

But, I have to admit, Simon Peter would likely not be anywhere near the top of my list. An evening with Peter would be quite something, wouldn't it? It definitely wouldn't be a calm, peaceful evening filled with quiet conversation.

Peter is often referred to as "impetuous." And, if you look impetuous up in a dictionary, here's what it says, "characterized by sudden, rash action or emotion; impulsive; passionate." Another dictionary defines "impetuous" as "characterized by undue haste and lack of thought or deliberation."

I'm guessing that an evening with impetuous Peter would be like spending an evening on a rollercoaster.

Simon Peter - who the gospels tell us was the one who saw Jesus walking on the water; said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water”; and then jumped in and started walking on the water himself. That is until Peter noticed that there was a strong wind blowing across the lake, became frightened, and began to sink, crying “Lord, save me!”

Simon Peter who declared that Jesus was “the Messiah, the son of the living God” and then a few days later said, “No way, Jesus, you’re not going to suffer and be killed.” To which Jesus replied, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.”

And, Simon Peter, the one, who with James and John, saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain and whose immediate response was to want to build three houses for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so they could linger there.

Impetuous Peter – the one who so many times opened his mouth without thinking. Probably not really good dinner company.

But, today’s Gospel reading has Simon Peter at dinner with Jesus and the other disciples. And, before they ate that evening, Jesus began to do something incredible and totally unexpected. He took off his outer garment, put a towel around his waist, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.

And, once again, impetuous Peter couldn’t seem to help himself as he blurted out, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet? I don’t think so. You will never wash my feet! That’s just a little too close for comfort. I can do that myself, thank you.”

To which Jesus calmly replied as he kept right on washing feet, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”

So, once again, Peter spoke before he thought and immediately reversed his earlier refusal, saying, “Then, Lord, go right ahead. I definitely want you to give me a good scrubbing and get me clean. Wash my feet, but don’t stop there. Wash my head and my hands, too!”

Poor impetuous, clueless Peter. He just doesn’t seem to get it.

“No,” Jesus said. “This foot-washing isn’t about taking a bath, because you are clean already. It’s about something else.”

And, the writer of John’s Gospel has told us what it was about at the very beginning of Chapter 13.

**Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.**

**To the end.**

In Greek, *eis telos*. Translated - fully or to the utmost. Jesus loved his disciples to the end, fully, to the utmost. Jesus loved his disciples as much as it is possible to love.

In the culture of that time and place, foot-washing was an act of hospitality offered to guests after a journey. By washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus welcomed the disciples into his “home,” his dwelling with the Father.

The essence of the foot-washing was Jesus’ offer of himself in love; the transformative power of the foot-washing was in the gracious and hospitable service of Jesus. In this act, God’s love for the world in sending Jesus was enacted in Jesus’ love for his own.

Jesus asked nothing of his disciples except to place themselves completely in his hands. To enter into relationship with him on his terms, allowing their relationship with him to be defined not on their terms or by their efforts but by God's love and God's love alone.

As Jesus washed their feet, there was no possibility of distance between Jesus and his followers. Instead there was an intimacy, an intimacy that was more than a little uncomfortable at first – just a little too close for comfort. But an intimacy that, if they could accept this gesture of love and hospitality, would bring them face to face with God's love for them.

Maundy Thursday is given its name based on the Latin – *mandatum novum*. A new commandment.

**I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.**

Sometimes I think we like to skip to this part of the reading and begin talking about ourselves and how we should love others. It's a nice moral, a good rule, to remember.

But, if we focus here on ourselves and the “new commandment” without first understanding the foot-washing and Jesus' gesture act of love and hospitality, without entering into intimate relationship with Jesus and therefore coming face to face with God, then I fear we miss the point.

**Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.**

On this Maundy Thursday, more than 2000 years removed from that dinner in Palestine, Jesus still loves his disciples, those of us gathered here tonight. Jesus loves us fully, to the utmost. Jesus loves us as much as it is possible to love.

He offers his love and his hospitality; he welcomes us to his “home,” his dwelling with God.

Jesus asks nothing of us except to place ourselves completely in his hands. To enter into relationship with him on his terms, allowing our relationship with him to be defined not on our terms or by our efforts but by God’s love and God’s love alone.

There are two great movements of grace here – “As I have loved you, you also should love one another.” And, the first is essential to the second. We cannot possibly love one another as Christ commanded, without first being in relationship with Christ and experiencing his love.

Poor impetuous, clueless Peter. He just didn’t get it. Not until he saw Christ’s love evidenced on the cross.

And, I believe that we are right there with Peter. If we want to understand what Jesus was saying when he washed the disciples’ feet - we, too, have to look at the cross.

AMEN.