"You Are Clean" -- John 13:1-30

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
12 April Anno Domini 2001
Maundy Thursday
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

"The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek Him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live for ever!" Psalm 22:26

Dear Baptized,

"It is the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:11). Inside there is Light and outside it is dark. Inside the Lord's own feast on the Lamb Whose Blood gives Life and Light; outside there is the plague imposed by the Angel of Death leaving death and darkness. Inside it is the Epiphany of the LORD where there is gladness and the hearing of the Word; outside it is dark for 'tis a place where there is weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Within the Blood-stained doorposts are the followers of Christ, along with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven; without that Door one is alone - lacking the Light of the world, without the cleansing of Christ, without an inkling of hope. So ...

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside His garments, and girded Himself with a towel. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to Him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"

Jesus has come not "to be served but to serve, and to give His Life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Therefore, it would be no different in this upper room where He celebrated the Passover with His disciples than the first Passover in Egypt when the Lamb not only stayed the hand of death at the door, but also served as the main course in the Passover Meal. The disciples are gathered in the gracious Presence of "the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Behold, they are not in doing mode but in receiving mode, for "It is the LORD's Passover" and in the Divine Service the Divine serves.

Natural man wants to negate God's mercy by turning this around. He seeks to invert the Divine service of the Gospel of grace into a contemporary service of the Law whereby, like Cain, man works to earn God's favor through an offering of this and that. But look, Jesus assumes the vocation of the lowliest slave and serves His own by washing their feet. This is not what one expects from the LORD God Almighty and do you not hear the objection? "Lord, do you wash my feet?" In other words, "Jesus, you seem to have this all backwards. You should be the one who has your feet washed by the lowliest here. Maybe we ought to consider who among us is the greatest so that the one who is the lowest might do the deed. Certainly, someone other than You ought to bow down and wash the filthy feet of those here. Lord, do You wash my feet?"

Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." There is something about this Divine service that the disciples will not understand until later. If that is so, then this foot-washing is a prelude to something else ... to an even greater service that will be undertaken for the benefit of His people and for the Life of the world ... a greater Sacrifice that will atone for the sins of the world. As for right now, on this night of the Passover, Jesus said, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." We must wait a bit now and listen to Him in awhile before understanding what this foot-washing means.

Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet." The disciple said this before ... not in these exact same words, but in similar ones. When Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised, the disciple replied, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:21-22). At that time, in the district of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus replied, "Get thee behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me; for you are not on the side of god, but of men" (v. 23), while this time, at the Passover in Jerusalem, "Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part in Me.'"

Listen to Him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in Me." Put aside all your self- conceived doings, words and thoughts ... they will not get the job done that needs to take place. Only Christ Jesus is able to do what is necessary in order for you to have a part in Him ... in order for you to be "in Christ." If the LORD God does not do this then neither Peter nor you nor I nor anyone else is able to have a part and a place in the Body of Christ. He must wash you; not you wash Him. He must descend in order to cleanse you, for you are not able to ascend even to wash His feet. To think that you are able to cleanse the holy, perfect righteous feet of God is a rejection of who He is and what He has come to do.

Simon Peter, whose sinful heart is always in the wrong place, said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Truly the words of Jesus are being fulfilled at that moment in the Upper Room. "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." On the Mount of Transfiguration "Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a Voice from the cloud said, 'This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased, listen to Him'" (Matthew 17:4-5). Listen to Him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand."

So now, do you understand? Not yet? Well, listen to Him for Jesus said to Peter, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over." "Look Peter, I am not talking about taking a bath here. You don't need a bath. The only thing that you need to have cleansed right now are your feet, and just as you don't need to have your body dunked under the water in order to clean the soles of your feet, neither do you have to have your body immersed to have your soul cleansed by Me." "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over, and you are clean." Peter, listen to Him. "You are clean!" You, Peter ... "you are clean!" You have God's Word on it." For it is not the water that does such great things, but the Word of God which is in and with the water. For without the Word of God the water is simple water and no cleansing.

Listen to Him, for He says more: "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over, and you are clean, but not all of you." There was one there at the Passover

Supper who, even though in the gracious presence of the Lord Jesus, was not clean. All of them had their feet washed by Jesus but not all of them were clean. So you see, this whole episode is not about the specific act of foot-washing at all; this is about the cleansing of the soul. "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over, and you are clean, but not all of you." One of them was an unclean soul for it is not the water that does such cleansing of the soul, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts such Word of God in the water. Faith is God's gift wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Good News of our Redeemer, Jesus. There was one who had fallen from the faith and who now trusts, not in Christ, but in himself and in his efforts.

"When He (Jesus) had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and resumed His place, He said to them. 'Do you know 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. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.'"

So just what is this foot washing that we are to be doing and when and where and how are we to wash one another's feet? Once again, it is not about our doing at all, but about what the Lord does. Consider the following: Jesus did this foot-washing and declared these words during a time when He was assembled with His disciples during the Passover Feast. He did and said this when He - the Incarnate Word - was graciously present with His disciples who were congregated in the place set aside for this purpose. This Upper Room became the sanctuary where, and the Feast was the holy time when, the LORD gathers His people in His Name and serves them Himself. In other words, it was a place and a time just like here and now - where and when the Incarnate Son of God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is graciously present for the cleansing of the souls in His Church.

The foot-washing takes place through Word and Sacrament, and the foot-washing is the application of the Gospel to the souls of the people in preparation for the Lord's Supper.

In Baptism the washing takes place, for we are cleansed in Christ and have a part in the Body of Christ - that is, His Church. Thus did the Lord save us "by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of Eternal Life" (Titus 3:5-7). Therefore, listen to Jesus, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in Me."

Then there is the proclamation of the Word which forgives sins and it prepares us to enter into the presence of God, namely, the foot-washing of personal forgiveness announced to others and to ourselves. "Therefore confess your sins to one another" (James 5:16) and continue to be "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). When the congregation assembles for the Divine Service, "we are to confess our guilt before one another and forgive one another before we come into God's presence to beg for forgiveness. Now we are debtors one to another, therefore we should and we may confess publicly in everyone's presence, no one being afraid of anyone else" (Large Catechism). Thus, following the confession of sins, we hear the Holy Absolution of the Lord ... that we are forgiven "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This is announced by the called foot-washer of the Word with the same certainly as when Jesus declared the Absolution in the Upper Room when He said to Peter, "You are clean."

This proclamation of the forgiveness of sins which cleansed the soul was in preparation for the Feast that followed. For when the Lord Jesus took the unleavened bread of the Passover and the cup of blessing, He instituted the New Passover. The bread is the Flesh of Christ the Passover Lamb which His disciples are to take and eat. This is Jesus Whose very Body would be and was crucified for your sins. The wine in the cup is now the Blood of Jesus which His disciples are to take and drink. This is the very Blood of God that would be and was shed for you when He took your sins upon Himself that you might have the forgiveness of sins.

Once again, the foot-washing takes place through Word and Sacrament, and the foot- washing is the application of the Gospel to the souls of the faithful in preparation for the Lord's Supper - in anticipation of the Wedding Banquet of the Incarnate Son of God. Indeed, "blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews states it best:

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the Sanctuary by the Blood of Jesus, by the new and living Way which He opened for us through the Curtain, that is, through His Flesh, and since we have a great Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (10:19-25).

How we would like to end at this point, but there is more and the words of Jesus are sobering. Listen to Him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over, and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who was to betray Him; that was why He said, "You are not all clean.""

"He that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). While it is most certainly true that unbelief is the only thing that will condemn someone, it is also true that unbelief is sufficient to condemn a person. There was such a person in the room with Jesus. Listen to our Lord speak of him: "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom He spoke. One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, ‘Tell us who it is of whom He speaks.' So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to Him, ‘Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.' So when He had dipped the morsel, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.' Now no one at the table knew why He said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the feast', or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night."

Dear Baptized, these are some of the most frightening, lamentable words ever written. Do you understand what has happened? Judas has turned his back and walked away from Jesus, the Passover Lamb. "He immediately went out; and it was night." He has departed from the gracious presence of the Lord and leaving behind Jesus, Who is the Door to Paradise and the Way to Heaven. And for Judas, "it was night." He passed into the way that leads to destruction and put behind him the Blood-

stained doorposts and lintel. "And it was night." Judas excommunicates himself, leaves the congregation and goes out into the streets to meet the Angel of Death - a place where there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth. He leaves the Light of Salvation and ventures into the darkness of the world "and it was night." Judas left the Presence of the Lord with his feet washed but not having his soul cleansed.

Now do you not understand what this foot-washing means and what Jesus meant when He said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in Me'"? May God, in His mercy and grace, grant that you and I be blessed with the gift to remain faithful - gathering together in the Presence of the LORD - in this holy House of God in order to live in the Baptismal grace that washes away our sins, in order to eat this New Passover instituted by Jesus, and to listen to Him say, "You are clean." Amen.