

### **John 13:1-17 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup> The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper

<sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,

<sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.

<sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

<sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

<sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

<sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

<sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"

<sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.

<sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

<sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

<sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are

messengers greater than the one who sent them.

<sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

**John 13:31-35 (NRSV)**

<sup>31</sup> When he (Judas) had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.

<sup>32</sup> If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

<sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

<sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Tonight, I am sharing parts of a meditation I read a few years ago and stored it away in my office as a personal Maundy Thursday meditation.

This is a night on which we remember. Foot washing, bread, and wine. While the text for this evening doesn't mention the last meal, and in John, it is a foretelling of the betrayal and not the actual meal, it is one of emphasize for this evening and gives us the mandate on how we are to live each day and go forth as disciples of Jesus.

We remember something that happened so long ago, none of us can trace our family trees back that far.

We remember something that happened so far away, most of us have never been there, and never will be.

Nevertheless, we remember.

We remember that on this night, Jesus and his friends were also gathered to remember. They gathered for a Passover meal, the Seder, which is, exactly, a feast of remembering.

Like us, they were gathered around a table.

Like us, they were telling the story of their faith.

Like us, they were calling to mind the saving acts of God...

They remembered God being with them, in steadfast love, even as they were treated harshly and enslaved.

They remembered God leading their ancestors in faith out of slavery and turning their bitter burden into sweet freedom.

And as they dipped the vegetables in salt water, to remind them of their tears, and as they ate the sweet fruit, to remind them of their joys, they were putting it all together.

That's what "remember" means... to put something back together. We "re-member" something, and what was scattered becomes whole. What was many becomes one.

And so, they remembered together, Jesus and his friends, their identity as God's covenant people. Simon was there (who Jesus had named Peter), and Andrew. John and James, the brothers, sons of Zebedee. Philip. Bartholomew. Thomas and Matthew. Another James, the son of Alphaeus. Thaddeus. Another Simon, the Cananean. And of course, Judas Iscariot. A sidenote here, also, the women who likely prepared the supper, the ones who are neither named nor mentioned; but logic tells us, they were surely there.

They were all there, to remember God's great and saving acts. They were there, in a sense, to remember who they were.

And then Jesus did something... inexplicable.

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

This was not the first time Jesus had taken bread, and blessed it, and broken it, and given it to people to eat. But those other times, he did it for great crowds. Here, in this large upstairs room somewhere in Jerusalem, Jesus did it for his friends. The people he loved.

He did it for a group of people who, from the beginning of their time together, mostly didn't understand what he was doing and where they were going.

He did it with a level of confidence that this was, in fact, the last supper he would share with them.

On this night, at this meal, the meaning of the bread was pre-determined. Matzoh, the bread eaten at the Passover Seder, is called the "bread of affliction" or adversity. In Isaiah 30 it says,

*Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. ~Isaiah 30:20*

The matzoh reminds of the suffering of the slaves in Egypt. But on that night, Jesus tells his friends, he is the bread. He will suffer.

Then, scripture tells us, Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the new covenant..."

Again, Jesus has taken this night of remembering, and done something new and electrifying.

The meaning of the wine at the Passover meal is consistent. The wine is shared as part of a blessing.

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine, and who gave us, Lord our God, with love, festivals for happiness, holidays and times for joy, this day of Passover, the time of our freedom.<sup>1</sup>*

At the Seder, wine is drunk in blessing and celebration and abundance, and the sharing of it is meant to “show freedom and majesty.”

And then Jesus, after passing around the wine, says, “This is my blood.”

Jesus tells his friends, his life will be poured out, in much the same way as the life of the Passover lamb.

Jesus joins with his friends to remember, to celebrate the Passover... a meal that resonates at the heart of their identity as Jews. At the same time, Jesus interprets the bread and wine of that meal in a way that forms the heart of our identity.

That is what we are here to remember, to re-member. We are putting it back together. In re-membering, what was scattered becomes whole. What was many becomes one.

At this table, we remember that Jesus spoke of his body being broken, like a piece of bread; and he spoke of his life being poured out, like a cup of wine.

And now, Jesus is not hidden from us anymore; our eyes can see our Teacher.

We see: in Jesus, God’s love is poured out, like a never-ending cup of wine.

We see: in Jesus, God’s presence comes to us, our daily bread, bread for the journey.

We see: in Jesus, God acts with love and power, and the goal, again, is joy and freedom.<sup>1</sup>

And so, tonight as we gather, we re-member:

On the night that he was to be betrayed by one of them, Jesus knelt before his disciples, his followers, and he washed their feet.

On the night that he was to be betrayed by one of them, Jesus sat at the table with his disciples, his followers, and he served them.

On the night that he was to be betrayed, in one of his final acts as teacher, he used the everyday and commonplace actions of washing of the feet before sharing a meal and the sharing of the meal itself to show his disciples what he meant when he said, *“Love one another, as I have loved you...share the bread and the drink that you have...feed the hungry, refresh the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, comfort the oppressed...serve one another...whenever you do these things, do them in remembrance of me...live out what I have taught you and shown you...by this, the world will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for each other.*

May it be so.

1. Jewish Kiddush prayer used during the Seder Meal
2. Patricia Raube, Union Presbyterian Church, Endicott, NY