

Maundy Thursday
Saint Peter's
April 1, 2021

I am going to ask you to imagine that your medical doctor told you earlier today that you have a terminal illness and will in all likelihood be dead by this time next week. What would you do?

While an unbelieving few would do nothing, in no particular order, I suspect some of us would rush to see an attorney to make sure that our money and possessions are going to the correct people. Some folks might see the need to get rid of things that might reflect poorly upon them. Others may well get busy scrubbing the house clean because it is important that no messes be left behind. I imagine that some of us would take to the bed acting like we are dead before we are indeed really dead. And finally, more than a few of us will tell the important people in our lives that we love them, even perhaps forgiving and being forgiven for hurt and pain received and given. In other words, we would likely take care of things that were important to us.

Apparently, none of these things were of any importance to Jesus. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus' highest priority was washing the feet of his disciples. If you are wondering why Jesus believes foot washing is important, our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, says that washing someone's feet is central to our lives because Jesus came among us to completely overturn the traditional beliefs of how God works in the world. Jesus toppled the notion that wealth, power, and dominance took precedence over all else.

Jesus' entire life and ministry is about loving God and loving our neighbor. Bishop Curry goes on to proclaim: "if it's not about love, then it's not about God." Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved, you also should love one another."

When you think about it, just what is "new" about this commandment? Well, actually nothing!

Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, in fact, all the Old Testament prophets had been preaching, if not shouting the same thing. The Hebrew scripture constantly talks about loving God and loving our neighbor – trying to persuade us to love one another, because God is about love. The Bible is the story of God's relationship with humanity, but it is also a story that tells us that God's people did not understand this truth about God's love.

So, God gave us his son Jesus, the one who embodies the love of God for all to know. Jesus shows God's love through his ministry... by acts of healing... through parables...through miracles...through his very example.

It seems that we are just like those disciples, and they are just like all the people that came before them that heard about God's love. We and they just do not quite "get it." The reason most of us cannot get it is because we simply do not know what that kind of love looks like. Jesus must demonstrate this love to us.

As Jesus gathers his disciples and followers around him, he takes off his outer garment, gets on his knees with a basin of water and begins to wash their feet. Washing someone else's feet was considered a very

humiliating undertaking, so demeaning that even a Jewish slave could not be required to wash their owner's feet. But Peter does not understand what or why Jesus would even think about washing feet and thus, he ultimately outright refuses this generous act.

What Peter is missing in part is that Jesus came so that he might show us how to love.

Loving like Jesus is terribly difficult, and so is receiving that type of love. Peter cannot accept that Jesus is offering to wash his feet any more than he can accept that a master would die on the behalf of his slave. It is only when Peter denies Jesus, running away in shame that Peter learns he cannot love like Jesus before he experiences Jesus' way of love.

It is through this simple act of foot washing that Jesus transforms the meaning of glory from one associated with power or victory by force to the belief that we glorify God only when "we love one another." Jesus' love is complete or perfected love. In modeling acts of love with his disciples, Jesus gives us a new, fresh vision of being in relationship with God. In other words, God can win the world by love, rather than with violence ... and God can win the world with empathy, not with apathy or indifference.

In the next few days as we complete this Holy Week, know that we too need to accept the love just as Jesus gives it to us. Jesus challenges us to just lower our guard a little to receive his love so that we too will live a life of discipleship that reflects his perfect love for each one of us.

Remember, if it's not about love, then it's not about God. Amen.