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Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY (dual parish service St. John’s, Kimball, NE)  
Maundy Thursday  
March 29, 2018  
Text: John 13:1–17, 31b–35

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus knows that His hour of suffering and death has arrived. Our Lord also knows that He’s surrounded by selfish, glory-hungry men; one of whom is His betrayer, the Satan-possessed Judas Iscariot. Evil men outside the upper room (i.e., priest, scribes, Jewish leaders, etc) are plotting Jesus’ death. Surrounded by so much evil, Jesus loves. “When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (vs. 1).

There’s a hymn in our hymnal attributed to the 15<sup>th</sup> century mystic Thomas a Kempis that marvels at Christ’s love for us, for His Church, for this world and all of its people:

O love, how deep, how broad, how high,  
Beyond all thought and fantasy,  
That God, the Son of God, should take  
Our mortal form for mortals’ sake! (LSB 544:1)

The following five stanzas then recount the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus including His baptism, fasting, temptations by Satan; our Lord’s teachings and prayers for us, His signs and wonders, His betrayal by Judas, the shameful death Jesus endured, and finally our Lord’s glorious resurrection. The final, doxological stanza returns to the theme of our Lord’s perfect, divine love:

All glory to our Lord and God  
For love so deep, so high, so broad;  
The Trinity whom we adore  
Forever and forevermore. (LSB 544:7)

How is it that Jesus is able to love so deep, so high, and so broad, even when surrounded by such evil? It is His nature to love. God is love the apostle John wrote in his first epistle. And the apostle Paul describes godly love in I Corinthians 13, the love

that is patient, and kind, the love that endures, believes, bears, and hopes all things even as it refuses to enjoy evil but rejoices in truth and humility.

Satan, however, delights in blinding the hearts and minds of men to God's love; he desires to deceive us into thinking that love is strong emotions about ourselves and passionate attachments to others. The truth of the matter is that what Satan presents is a cheap imitation that always disappoints.

Surrounded by evil, Jesus, the blessed Son of God, chooses to love His frail, sinful disciples by doing for them what they could not do for themselves. In other words, that love which is so deep, high, and broad, is revealed, not in strong emotions and sentiments, but in deeds of grace and sacrificial service. Jesus, knowing that His hour had come, loved His disciples when "He laid aside his outer garments, and (took) a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (vs. 4-5).

You cannot know God's love outside of Jesus. And you can only know Jesus through the means of His loving service to wash us clean from our corrupting, defiling sins. To know and experience divine, holy love is to be washed by Jesus. He must purify us. No one else can make us clean. No one else can love us with such perfection.

The apostle Peter objected to such love revealed in humble acts of service. When our Lord came to wash Peter's dirty, smelly feet, that earthy, proud apostle objected, "Lord, do you wash my feet? ... You shall never wash my feet" (vs. 6, 8a). Peter would not have Jesus, the Lord and master, wash his feet. Peter did not yet understand love.

But our Lord warned Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (vs. 8b). To know Jesus and His deep, holy love is to receive the washing that only His hands can give. Peter provides us the response of repentance and faith which guides us in all things, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (vs. 9). Wash me thoroughly Jesus! Cleanse me from head to toe. Make my heart and soul and body and mind a clean vessel fit for your presence. Only your love, Jesus, revealed in sacrifice and service, can make me clean.

Yes, dear saints of God, to know Jesus' love is to be cleansed by Him from all sin and evil. The means by which Jesus cleanses us now is not to wash our feet with water, as

He did in the upper room on the night of His betrayal. That original foot-washing pointed to the perfect agent of cleansing: the blood of Jesus shed on Golgotha. Jesus' holy, divine blood is the only means of cleansing us. God's love is revealed in Christ Jesus as He gives Himself to us completely, without reservation in suffering and death.

In our Lord's wisdom, He gives Himself and His love to us by means of Baptism, Supper, and powerful Word.

Baptism is a complete, total cleansing from all sin for it is Christ's blood coming to us in all of its potency. That one-time bath is sufficient for all eternity. After hearing our Lord's firm rebuke, Peter responded with eager zeal and determination, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (vs. 9). To this Jesus said, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean..." (vs. 10). In Christ, you are all clean. Your feet get dirty as you live in this unclean world. But your baptism remains true. In love, Jesus cleanses your feet each and every day, not with a new baptism, but with His on-going promise that through repentance and faith, He washes away the guilt and stains of sin.

And yet we must not forget the depth and breadth of Jesus' love given to us by means of His holy meal. On the same night in which our Lord washed His disciples' feet, He gave them His holy Supper. In that Supper, Jesus gives His love to us as we feast on His body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of all sin. In Christ, you are all clean. But your feet get dirty as you live in this unclean world. Jesus cleanses you each and every time you eat His body and drink His blood. His body is meat indeed and His blood is drink indeed.

So Baptism and Lord's Supper are inseparably linked together. The cleansing of baptism leads to the regular, frequent reception of Christ's body and blood. The Lord's Supper returns us back to the cleansing received in Holy Baptism. BOTH direct our attention to the preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected for us and our salvation. These gifts make us participants in Christ's love revealed in His death and resurrection. Nothing in John 13 makes any sense except in light of Jesus' love demonstrated in His death and resurrection completed for you and for His beloved people. Our Lord Himself said on the night in which He was betrayed, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (vs. 31b).

And our daily lives are forever marked by Christ's love. Did not the Lord Jesus Himself exhort His washed and fed disciples to follow Him by loving others in the same way He loved them? "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 also should do just as I have done to you...A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (vs. 14–16, 34–35).

The love of Christ is known and experienced in being washed by Christ unto eternal life and by sharing His redemptive love with one another in concrete deeds of service and wholesome words of edification. Love one another, saints of God, in Christ's holy name. Family members according to their various stations in life. Your neighbor in his or her need. Prayers uttered on behalf of all people. Words of encouragement to the disheartened. Tears with those who weep. Laughter with those who rejoice. Each and every day, bearing the burdens of others in the love and name of Christ.

Though we are surrounded by so much evil, Christ compels us to love one another with His love. For we are loved perfectly, even unto the end of the ages. Let us pray the prayer uttered by St. Paul for the Ephesians Christians (3:16–19):

[According to the Father's riches in glory] may He grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being ... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.