



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 21, 2011

Maundy Thursday

Sermon Text: [Luke 22:19-24](#); [John 13:2-5, 14](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 12:1-14](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 116](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 11:23-28](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 13:1-15, 34](#)

### **The Apostles, The Servant Leaders**

The Lamb has died for our sins  
We eat and drink the forgiveness he has won

That group that was there with Jesus on that first Maundy Thursday evening was quite an assorted group, wasn't it? Some of them hated...the former tax collector, right? Some of them loudmouths who had the nickname "sons of thunder"...loudmouth hotheads I suppose you would have called them. Fishermen, all different backgrounds...12 of them then, 11 later. If I asked you to name all 12, or name 11 (I'll give you Judas who goes out and hangs himself later) if God were to come to you this evening and say "If you can't name those 11, I'm not letting you into my heaven," are you going to sweat a little bit right now?

As we consider this group of men that God entrusted the task of spreading the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (he put it in their hands), as we consider this group, you might kind of wonder what kind of rag tag group is this that God entrusted such an important task to. These guys don't seem to be the world's greatest selection of leaders. I don't think these guys would have made *Apprentice* or *Celebrity Apprentice*. They just don't seem to have leadership skills. Yet, as we consider these words that I read to you from John and Luke, we see how the Lord sets them as the example of being servant leaders. We see how they fall short. And we see how the Lord truly transformed them.

You know how Jesus got the room. You know that story. We read that during the Passion History this year from Matthew, how they got to the Upper Room. For a special meal like this, a Passover meal, it would have been quite the norm that someone would have washed everyone's feet. The task usually would have fallen to a household servant. But as they are there, Jesus, after having already talked with them for awhile and there had been no household servant that came along with the Upper Room evidently, Jesus himself gets up, takes off his outer clothing, wraps a towel around himself and then goes around and, as far as we know, silently washes their feet. These guys had followed Jesus because they believed he was going to be the Messiah, not because they thought he'd wait on them hand and foot literally. This isn't why they were following him, to be waited on by Jesus. Yet Jesus was doing it for a very real and vivid reason. He wanted to drive home the truth of why we call this Maundy Thursday.

Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin "mandatum," or "mandates" in English, which means "command." We'll hear it in our Gospel this evening. Jesus says, "A new

command I give to you. Love one another.” You might be thinking that’s not new. The Old Testament is full of “love the Lord your God with all your heart” and “love your neighbor.” It’s depicted throughout the Old Testament that you are to love. This is what they knew. So why is he calling it a new command. I think he’s calling it a new command because of what he is about to teach them as he washes their feet. He says, “A new command I give to you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Then he shows them how he loves them by putting their interest ahead of his own. By humbling himself, not demanding praise and honor and respect, but loving them so much that there’s really no choice left but to honor, praise and respect him because of the depth of his love and how he puts their interests ahead of his own and our interests ahead of his own.

You see our Savior there and you have to think that as he came to each one of the their feet and he’s washing their feet that each one of them has to think exactly what Simon said, “No, no Lord. I should wash your feet. You shouldn’t be washing mine.” They knew this was a guy that shouldn’t be washing their feet. Here is the one who has created the whole world just by saying “Let there be,” and there was, kneeling down and washing feet. This is the depth of our Savior’s love for us.

So Jesus says, “I’ve set an example that you should do as I have done for you.” He’s really telling them “I’m going to entrust you with a great and important task, but the way you are going to have to carry it out is to love as I have loved you, to be humble, to put the interest of others ahead of your own and not worry about how you are perceived but instead worry about what you can control, how you perceive others and how you can serve others.”

It’s a powerful lesson, right? The one who created the world is now on his hands and knees washing feet. That should have sunk in, right? He told them he was going to die. He washes their feet to show them the depth of his love. And they respond by arguing a little while later about which among them would be the greatest, who is going to sit on his right and who is going to sit on his left. They still didn’t quite get this whole idea of being a servant and humbling themselves and putting the interests of others ahead of their own. They were too worried about what their rank was going to be.

It’s kind of sad, isn’t it? It kind of makes you shake your head and you read that and see that every year in the Gospels as you read through the history of Jesus’ suffering and death. Then again, it shouldn’t really surprise us a whole lot, should it? We aren’t a whole lot different, are we? We know what God has called us to be. We know the full extent of his love. We know how he has loved us. Yet how often don’t we get worried about how we are appreciated or how we’re noticed?

You sit down and talk with Christians at times and it gets around to service and the Lord. Usually you don’t have to prod and pull a whole lot to hear from someone that they served on the Church Council or they did this or they were the head of the Lady’s Aid or they did that, and they did it this many years and that many years. Or you talk to someone who is maybe actively serving and you get to hear about what they did and

how many people weren't there to help them. As though Jesus was really washing Thomas' (called Didymus) feet thinking "Gee I wish Thomas you'd get up and wash someone else's feet." I think the point that Jesus was trying to show was that as Christians we are to show love to others and not worry about what they are doing. But we spend a lot of time worrying about what everyone else does, don't we? And it really comes back to work righteousness, doesn't it? That God should love us more because we do more or we've done more and we want to pat ourselves on the back. So evidently we are serving in some aspect of our sinful nature so that we are noticed and appreciated and loved, and if we're not, we aren't happy. That's not the example that Jesus set for us, is it? Yet that's often where we are.

That's why what happened next is so important for those disciples there on that first Maundy Thursday and so important for us this evening. Jesus knowing what thick-headed fools his followers are, both his disciples back then and his disciples today, gave them a gift so that they would have the full extent of his love always in front of them, always there to be seen, always there to be smelled, always there to be touched, always there to be tasted. He said, "This cup, this is my blood. It's poured out for you for your forgiveness. This bread, this is my body. It's given for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Your sins of thinking and worrying about how you're considered and perceived and received. Your sins of pulling your shoulder out of its socket patting yourself on the back for all of your service. Your sin of focusing on yourself instead of on me." That's really what Jesus is trying so desperately hard to get the disciples and us to do, isn't it? Take our eyes off ourselves and our service and look at him and focus on him and his service.

The full extent of his love is that he gives us this Sacrament. He doesn't explain it all to us. He simply says, "Believe it. There's bread, wine, body and blood. Don't try to explain it because you're human reason can't explain it. I'm God. I said 'Let there be,' and there was, and you're going to try to figure out how to explain it and you're all of a sudden going to be able to explain what I just said it is?" We don't need to do that. Simply believe what he says.

It's there. It's for our forgiveness. And we take our eyes off ourselves. If I can't understand it, it must not be. We take our eyes off ourselves and we put them on God and his promises. We rejoice that he loves us in spite of who we are. He grabs us in his arms. He holds us tight and says, "I gave my body and blood to take away every last one of your sins. I did it so you can be changed so you don't have to be so self centered and self focused. I did it so you can carry out the task I have given you." For those men, that meant Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

How did it work out for them? As they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, and prayer, the Lord's Supper and study of the Word, Word and Sacrament, did God strengthen them? Did God enable them to do what they could never do on their own? These are the guys that ran away later that night and abandoned Jesus and left him completely alone and barren later that night. That's these guys, yet they took the Gospel everywhere because they devoted themselves to

Word and Sacrament. And maybe, just maybe the fact that you probably can't name them right now is testimony to the fact that they were transformed into servant leaders who didn't point to themselves, who didn't share the Gospel and thump their chest to show what heart they had in doing it, but simply pointed people to Jesus and let the Spirit do the work and let God receive the glory.

Tradition tells us that those men, all except for John, died a martyr's death. John died in exile as an older man, but we are told, by the tradition of the church at least, that some of these men went as far away as India and perhaps Britain, crossed the Mediterranean world, into Europe, into the continent of Africa, into the content of Asia, and that these men truly became humble servant leaders emboldened by the Spirit of God to point people to Jesus and away from themselves and to embrace people with the Gospel of Christ and announce the forgiveness of sins.

That's what God has called us to do...point people away from ourselves, embrace people with the Gospel of Christ and assure one another of the forgiveness of sins. One of the really nice things this evening is we, the body of Christ who have been entrusted with the ministry of the keys, get to use them. Usually it's just me as the pastor using them in worship. But a little bit later you'll all have the chance to say to your brothers and sisters in Christ that are here, to announce to them that they are forgiven, to hug them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Don't just mumble the words and think of it as a verbal exercise until you sing the next hymn. Consider the power God has entrusted to you. And then rejoice that his Spirit has transformed you also into a servant leader that points people away from yourself to your Savior.