**April 17, 2014 – Maundy Thursday**

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One of the most popular trends in the Church today is Servant Leadership. I guess, technically, it’s been popular since the Last Supper, as depicted in the Gospel of John, but now it’s REALLY popular. We hear about it in seminary. We TALK about it in seminary. A LOT. If you get through an entire Commission on Ministry or Standing Committee interview, or search process without using the term at least once, and preferably many times, it would be a miracle.

I think we have a pretty good handle on what it means to be a servant leader, and if not, Jesus spells it out, or at least his expectation of it. “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet,” he says. “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

Okay. Got it. Humble ourselves to be servants to each other. Right.

But…this passage isn’t just about that. We also have Peter’s response. I have such a soft spot for Peter. Peter is us. He’s Everyman. He’s the first off the boat, but then he sinks in fear. He’s the only one recorded as having denied Jesus at his trial, but then he comes back fiercely in Acts to become the bedrock of the Church. And here, he’s no different. How many of us have reacted like Jesus in similar circumstances?

“What are you doing with that towel and basin, Jesus?” he asks.

“C’mon, Pete,” Jesus says, “I’m going to wash your feet.”

“Ha ha, good joke, Lord!”

“No really. Kick off your sandals.”

“No, that’s okay. I’m good.”

“Peter…”

“Okay, Jesus, the jokes over. You don’t need to wash my feet. Really. I’m fine. I just washed them…er…a couple of days ago!”

And on and on. I think Peter was secretly from South Dakota. Or Minnesota.

But Jesus doesn’t let up on him. Here’s the part we don’t learn in seminary. We learn plenty about SERVANT leadership, but we don’t learn much about RECEIVING leadership. We don’t learn how to joyfully take what’s offered to us.

And I suspect that this is true of most of us, not just seminarians. It’s not polite to take things without giving something in return. It’s not polite to just sit there and let someone wait on us. I’m okay doing it by myself. Any of these sound familiar?

Jesus answers with, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." The word for “share” is “*meros*,” which is translated as, “a part, portion, or share.” One of the interesting expanded definitions is, “one of the constituent parts of a whole,” as in, “they divided his garments into four parts.”

So Jesus could be telling Peter, “unless you let me wash your feet, you can’t be my disciple.” That’s pretty harsh treatment for someone who is just trying to be polite, and to not be a bother. Or, he could be telling Peter, “until you let me wash your feet, there will be piece missing from my body.” You are vital, and it’s vital that you let yourself be served. That puts a different spin on things.

Then Peter gives in, making one last joke of course, and Jesus goes on to wash the rest of the disicples’ feet. All of them. All twelve. Including Judas. Whom he knows, and has already pointed out, is going to betray him. And he says, “Just as I have washed your feet, so you should wash each other’s feet. Just as I have treated you, so you should treat each other. Just as I have LOVED you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

So let us go out and serve each other, as Jesus sets the example for us to follow. And not just each other in the Church, or those who deserve our service, but also those who have hurt us, who might betray us, who are our enemies. Let us wash the feet of those with whose lifestyle or actions we disagree, without judgment and without prejudice. Merely with love. God’s love. Because that’s how they will know we’re followers of the one who IS love.

And secondly, when someone reaches out to us, accept their help. Accept the love they offer. It’s not wrong and it’s not impolite, no matter how much our northern European pioneer ancestors are yelling in our mental ears that it is. We need each other and we need to be needed. The Body of Christ is not complete without it.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." This is how the great three days of the Triduum start. With community and with love.

Amen.