

In last week's reading, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that "God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). The woman answered, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things" (John 4:25). Jesus answered, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:26).

In today's reading, Jesus is drawing ever so close to that monumental event where He will crush the head of the serpent who led Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and lose their right relationship with God. And the very next day, He will suffer and die on the cross to give all of us children of Adam and Eve access to our heavenly Father. John begins our reading with these words in John 13, verse 1: "Now before the Feast of the Passover, 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."

As we think back to the events of Jesus' Last Supper and all that followed, it's important to remember Jesus was completely aware of all that lay before Him. He clearly saw the betrayal and arrest in the garden, the trials, the flogging, and crucifixion. He saw the tomb that would be made empty by His resurrection. With those things at the forefront of His thoughts, Jesus gathered His disciples in the Upper Room for one last meal and one last lesson using water. We read in verses 2–6: "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking 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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, 'Lord, do You wash my feet?'"

Jesus' disciples knew very well that only the lowest house slave would crawl around the table on his hands and knees washing the feet of the guests in a Jewish house. And usually, not even Jewish servants would do that dirty job, only the lowest *gentile* servant. Peter felt this was far too humiliating for Jesus, the promised Messiah. What would he think of Jesus hanging on a cross—the humiliating execution reserved for the most despised criminals? Verse 7 continues: "Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.'"

Jesus was teaching a lesson in love and service, just how far God was willing to stoop down to save His lost and sinful people. It was a powerful and

memorable demonstration with water that would make any Jew catch his breath.

Jesus could have had another reason to ask Peter to trust Him and quietly submit to his feet being washed. Jesus not only wanted to teach His twelve a lesson in love, humility, and service, He wanted to pull Judas out of Satan's clutches. Jesus washed Judas's feet right along with all His other disciples' feet to make it memorably clear to Judas that Jesus was completely aware of his plot to betray Him. But Jesus still loved him and wanted nothing more than to wash away that sin, forgive him, and restore him with the apostles.

Unfortunately, Peter was not really the kind to quietly accept something he didn't agree with, as we read in verse 8: "Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.'"

A share of what? Jesus' inheritance, a place in the heavenly mansions with God, our Father. When Peter did understand, as usual, he went **overboard** the **other** way. He continued: "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For He knew who was to betray Him; that was why He said, "Not all of you are clean." (vv. 9-11)

Did you hear that, "Not all of you are clean"? What a remarkable way for Jesus to gently confront Judas with his sinful plot. None of the other disciples had any idea what Jesus meant by "not all of you are clean," but Judas certainly knew. It reminds me of the gentle way Jesus exposed his knowledge of the Samaritan woman's sin at the well when He told her, "You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true" (John 4:18). Jesus didn't need to directly confront Judas and expose his sin for all the other disciples to see. If Judas would have repented, none of the other eleven would have been the wiser that Judas had accepted thirty silver pieces to betray Jesus. That could have forever remained between Jesus and Judas alone. Sadly, Judas refused to repent. And a few hours later, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, Judas was so seized with guilt and remorse, he did not turn to Jesus but, in despair, took matters into his own hands, killing himself.

We, however, turn back to Jesus again in verses 12-17, "When He had washed their feet and put on His outer garments and resumed His place, He said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 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. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Even though Judas did not benefit from the water Jesus used to wash his feet, the other eleven did. They learned that among the followers of Jesus Christ there is no room for superiority or domination. If the mighty, eternal Son of God was not too high and mighty to go around on His hands and knees washing dirty feet, if He was not too proud to sacrifice Himself for our sins by being nailed to a cross and to suffer the humiliation of crucifixion in front of the massive crowds passing by on their way into Jerusalem for the Passover, then no loving act of service could be too low or humiliating for them to show love for one another. Or for us either.

In verse 18, Jesus continues, “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate My bread has lifted his heel against Me.’”

Since Judas had not responded to Jesus washing his feet, Jesus ratchets it up a bit. Judas had to have been shocked when Jesus announced the plot he thought he had hidden away from everyone. Here is Jesus predicting Judas's betrayal to the other disciples. It had to be a moment of shock and dread for Judas. Perhaps his heartbeat was thundering in his ears. Jesus could easily turn the tables on Judas, betraying him to the others the same way Judas was plotting to betray Jesus to His enemies. Yet even so, Jesus didn't betray him. He revealed His knowledge in the perfect way to still protect Judas from suspicion by the other eleven, and from retaliation.

A few verses after our reading, Jesus went so far as to point out precisely who would betray Him by dipping a piece of bread and giving it to Judas. Yet even here, the disciples did not make the connection that Judas was the betrayer until after they saw Judas leading the guards and soldiers into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus.

In so many different ways during this Last Supper, Jesus reached out to Judas to show him the magnitude of the sin he considered and Jesus' even greater willingness to forgive and restore him. Judas could never deny that he had no idea if Jesus would have forgiven him or not. His feet were clean from Jesus having washed them by hand! If only that truth would have sunk in and brought Judas to tears of remorse and repentance so Jesus could have restored him!

But, even if Judas would not benefit from Jesus' words, the other disciples could when they saw it all unfold. They would know Jesus was God's Son who knew the future and the thoughts buried in a man's mind. And they would understand our Savior's amazing love, knowing exactly what Judas would do, yet being willing to step forward in the garden to shield the other disciples from harm, and permit Himself to be arrested, bound, and led away to the cross to win salvation for all of us. Jesus continued in verses 19-20, "I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives the one who sent Me."

Shortly after this, Judas left the Upper Room to go to the Jewish leaders. Jesus completed His teachings by telling His disciples about the home He would prepare for them in His Father's mansions and promising the coming of the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus led them out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

By washing His disciples' feet, Jesus set **us** an example of how we should live together with our brothers and sisters in this congregation and throughout the Holy Christian Church. Filled with thankfulness for our Savior's great sacrifice and salvation and trusting God our Father to provide all of our needs, we look for ways we can humbly serve one another.

What does that look like? It doesn't necessarily **have** to be by washing others' feet (or even pastors' dirty socks!). For example, it could be by preparing or delivering a meal to a neighbor who's mourning the death of loved one. It might be by doing a chore or two for someone who is recovering after a hospital stay or going through some other very difficult time. And serving someone with kind and encouraging words almost always brightens a person's day. Yes, there are so many ways we can be humble and serve and help one another.

And getting back to another theme from our text: When we are brought to repentance for a sin that crushes our conscience with guilt, or when we are distressed by a grievous sin committed against us, we can follow Jesus to the cross. There we see the price He willingly paid, the punishment that we deserve and all those who sin against us deserve. We see the spotless Son of God, forsaken by His Father, crushed under the load of all our sin, and satisfying God's wrath.

Jesus' death and resurrection assure us of God's full and free forgiveness for all of our sins, no matter how great or small. Covered in Jesus' grace by God's living water, we are free to love and serve one another as Jesus Christ has served us. Amen.