

“Loving Jesus”
Sermon for Maundy Thursday
April 9, 2020

Texts: Matthew 26:17-30 & (John 13:1-7, 31b-35—in text of the sermon)

Matthew 27:17-30 (ESV)

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so." Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Let us pray. O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy peace. Amen. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

One of my Seminary professors, Dr. Norman Nagel, was received into our Lord's glorious presence earlier this year. Dr Nagle was once offering guest commentary for a live Christian radio talk show. A portion of the broadcast was devoted to a telephone open line during which listeners could call in and offer comments or ask questions. One listener called and proceeded to several times talk about how much they loved Jesus, even that they really, loved Jesus. When the call was completed, Dr. Nagel calmly and insightfully answered, "The big thing is not how much we love Jesus; rather, the big thing is how much Jesus loved us.

Our theme tonight on this Maundy Thursday is "Loving Jesus." I invite you to consider with me two texts as we first see how much Jesus loves us and, then, how Jesus calls us to love Him.

So, again, first of all, we consider how the word "loving" is a word that is used to describe Jesus. Our Gospel account this evening presents to us Jesus celebrating the Passover with His disciples. God's people had first celebrated Passover some 1500 years in the past. We read about it in our Old Testament reading tonight. That Passover was a special event and meal as God's people gathered in their families. God gave them special instructions about that meal and their gatherings. As God's people observed and kept God's Word in

faith, the angel of death “passed over” the homes of His people and no one inside died. The Passover was the annual celebration of this liberating event—for then the Pharaoh of Egypt set free the Israelites who had been enslaved for over 400 years. The firstborn of every Egyptian family died in every home whose doorposts did not have blood on them. But God spared His people and did not destroy them.

Jesus is celebrating the Passover with His family, with His disciples—one last time. Jesus says “My time is at hand.” All of those lambs sacrificed in observance of Passover has pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus is about to go to slaughter upon the cross. Jesus in His great love for us goes to be our sacrifice for sin. He goes out in that night in which He will be betrayed, fully knowing what lies in front of Him. He knows Judas will turn Him over to those who will make sure He dies.

Before it happens, Jesus gives us to His followers, gives to us a great gift. He took the bread shared at the Passover meal, blesses it, and gives it to them and says, “Take eat; this is My body. He took the cup when He had given thanks and gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Behold the love of Jesus for us! He takes our sins and the judgment and death we deserve and gives to us His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins! Receiving in faith the bread and the wine and with them, by the very Word of Jesus, His true body and blood, we have the forgiveness for all of our sins!

There is no greater gift of love Jesus could give. He gives us His very self and with Him we have all He has accomplished for us. I am sure that, like me, you long for this precious gift which He gave, which He wants us to repeatedly receive because of our great need, daily, for forgiveness, and the comfort and strength we receive as we receive Jesus’ very life in this Sacrament. Yes we long for it now, especially, when this time of pandemic prevents us from receiving this precious gift and the life and hope it gives.

LCMS Pastor Will Weedon recently posted a hypothetical conversation between Satan and God which provides reflection on the blessings our loving Savior is accomplishing at this time:

“Satan: Let me strike them with plague and fear and death. They deserve it.”

“God: Go for it (meanwhile, I’ve arranged for My Word to take over their social medias, given them times of solace to reconnect with their family and reconnect their family to My Word, filling them with the Bread of Life that they might live forever and ever; teaching them to ACHE for Holy Communion; and showing them the vanity of all earthly things and the one thing needful which only I can provide). Good idea.”

Yes, we ache to come together as God’s family and join at the table of our Lord to receive the gifts of salvation. In Holy Communion Jesus delivers to us all the benefits of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation which He loving secured for us on the cross. With the hymn writer we pray

Jesus, bread of life, I pray You, Let me gladly here obey You.

By Your love I am invited, Be Your love with love requited;

By this Supper let me measure, Lord, how vast and deep love’s treasure.

Through the gift of grace You give me As Your guest in heav’n receive me.

“Be Your love with love requited.” To “requite” is to make an appropriate return.” Having freely received the saving love of Jesus, the appropriate return we make is to love Jesus. Jesus’ love comes first, but, having received such love, how can we not but love Him in return?

That brings us to our second text. It is printed for you on page six tonight, if you are following along in the service order. This also took place in the Upper Room that night as Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. John 13:1-17, 31b-35 (ESV):
 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. 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 answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 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." Simon Peter said to Him, "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." 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." . . . "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek Me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' 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."

Jesus, the loving servant, who will humble Himself to death on the cross, here first humbles Himself and does a task the disciples were unwilling to do for each other. Jesus gives to them and He gives to us a powerful lesson: love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” God’s people have been commanded before to love one another, even at some degree of sacrifice. Do we love in this way?

Do you love everyone equally? Would you perform a lowly act of service for someone your find disagreeable? It’s easy for us to say we love Jesus, but do we love each other, sacrificially, lovingly, with a servant heart? That’s how we show the love of Jesus. That love

is powerful and transformational. Loving Jesus by loving others draws those who do not yet know the love of Christ.

Jesus washes His disciples' feet to teach them about loving servanthood and sacrifice. I consider it meaningful that the next day, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate would wash his hands declaring himself to be innocent of Jesus' death. He didn't want anything to do with Jesus and washed His hands. Do we not find ourselves washing our hands of involvement with others who need our love rather than taking the basin and towel to do the loving tasks of serve our Savior gives?

Jesus tells His disciples that where He is going they cannot come. Only Jesus as true God and true Man can lovingly complete the tremendous sacrifice for all sinners. We cannot follow Jesus to the cross, but He asks us to imitate His love for us as we love one another. Jesus redeemed us through His self-sacrificial love that we may in turn imitate His love. Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." St. John writes in His first letter, "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

And when you find your love for your Savior and for others growing cold, run back to Him. Cling now to His Word of forgiveness and every blessing until we also kneel at His table as He lovingly feeds us with the blessings of His saving word. Then love one another as He has loved us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.