

Maundy Thursday – April 1, 2021

John 13:1

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now loved them to the end.

Dear fellow heirs of our Savior:

When a man faces his impending death, his thoughts often turn to what he'll leave behind. Not just the material possessions that he will pass on to others, but one last message he hopes to share with those he loves. In November of 1981, because of cancer, my dad had less than a month to live. We didn't know that, although as I look back I think my dad did know. I was home for Thanksgiving break, and my dad showed me how I'd have to change a pulley on the blower on the furnace in summer so the fan would run at the correct speed for the air conditioner. He showed me where he kept track on a wall in the garage when the oil was changed on our Plymouth Volare station wagon, and told me to make sure I changed it for my mom every 3000 miles. And then he sat down with my sister and me and told us that if mom ever wanted to remarry, he didn't want us to stand in her way. 3 weeks later we were back from our respective colleges for his funeral. That was 40 years ago, and I haven't forgotten it, because in a sense, that symbolized my dad's legacy: love and care for his family, especially a very unselfish love for his wife.

What about Jesus' deathbed legacy? Many people would jump to Good Friday, and Jesus' 7 words from the cross, but tonight we recognize that on Maundy Thursday Jesus was already on his deathbed—less than 24 hours from breathing his last breath.

Tonight we consider: **Jesus' deathbed legacy.**

Part 1: What was it like for Jesus on his deathbed? Since Genesis chapter 3, death has been part of the fabric of man's existence and until Judgment Day will continue to be a chapter in the life of each of us. But Jesus' deathbed was unique in a number of ways, including this: We read: Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. And it was more than just knowing the time of his death...it was knowing every bitter, agonizing detail of his death. In the previous chapter, Jesus had said, "Now my soul is troubled," troubled as he looked ahead to his betrayal, troubled as he looked ahead to a sham trial and abuse at the hands of pagan soldiers and a hateful and angry mob, troubled at the thought of a scourging, of the nails, the thorns and the hours on the cross. Jesus knew all of this, and could see himself covered from head to toe—body and soul—with the one thing he could not stand: sin. And not just any sin, but all sin, the sins of the world. Judas' sin of betrayal, Peter's sin of denial, and our sins: sins of anger, of condescending judgment, of haughty pride, of lust and greed, of bitterness and lack of contentment.

Yet this knowledge—knowledge of both the impending agony and all of the sins that were the cause of it did not temper Jesus' love for his disciples or for us, but rather it intensified it. John says, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now loved them to the end." Loved his own—when many men's thoughts would have focused on the agony that lay ahead, Jesus' focus is still on his own and the love he has for them.

He shows this love in so many ways on this dark and doleful night: when he rebukes the disciples for their pride, when he warns them of the temptations they will soon face, in protecting them during his arrest, in his prayers for them rather than just prayers for himself. But tonight as we focus on Jesus' deathbed legacy, let's focus on just two. **First consider the example of love that Jesus offers in the upper room.**

“Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around them.” How does this happen, that the very Son of God ends up with the most menial of tasks, a task that was usually relegated to the very lowest of servants. It happens because of sinful pride: According to Luke “a dispute arose among them as to which of them was to be considered the greatest.” The disciples were more interested in their relative levels of importance rather than volunteering to wash the feet of all who were in that upper room. Yet in spite of their pride, can you imagine their guilt as Jesus makes his way around the room with the towel and that bowl of water? Can you imagine their shame as they watched the one who had walked on water, fed thousands and raised the dead now kneel before each of them and was the dirt off their feet?

What would we have done? We know what Peter did. “Peter said, ‘No, you shall never wash my feet.’” As so often happens with Peter, we see a man who deserves both our admiration and our disappointment. Admiration that Peter is the disciple who speaks up, but also disappointment that Peter doesn't grab the towel and wash Jesus' feet. If we wonder how it ever came to this: 12 disciples watching their Lord and Master kneel before them all we have to do is remember this. While Peter, James, John and no doubt all of the other disciples—perhaps even Judas, would perhaps have jumped at the honor of washing Jesus' feet, what stopped them was this: If one of them would have washed Jesus feet, then they would have had to keep moving around the circle. Peter, wash Jesus' feet? Of course. But to wash the dirt off of the feet of James, or Matthew, or Thomas? How humiliating! How beneath him.

How beneath all of them and how beneath all of us. Like Peter, we often have a willingness to serve God; but struggle to match that with a willingness to serve others, especially to do something out of love for others who have shown no love for us. Or do something out of love for others when their views and opinions are polar opposite of mine. But then we see Jesus' deathbed legacy in that upper room: He didn't serve just the humble, he served the arrogant. He didn't just serve the loyal, he served the traitor. He didn't just serve the strong, he served the cowards. He didn't just serve those with good morals, he served the immoral. He didn't ask himself, “Who deserves my love?” He asked himself, “Who needs my love?”

Jesus both humbled the disciples and taught them a lesson. What was the main lesson? It wasn't “From now on, be sure to wash each other's feet.” In John 13 Jesus tells them: “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master. And in v.34: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Serve one another? Love one another. True Christian service flows out of love: love for God and love for each other. This is the first part of Jesus' legacy before us this evening.

Jesus' deathbed legacy

- 1. Jesus offers an example of love**
- 2. Jesus offers himself**

As wonderful as this lesson and legacy of loving service was on this last night before his death, Jesus offers an even greater gift a short time later. Our New Testament lesson from 1 Corinthians reminds us that it is in this same upper room that “the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Jesus, on the night he was betrayed... Can we appreciate the irony that on this of all nights, that this is the night that Jesus chooses to offer a legacy to his disciples that perhaps makes all other previous miracles pale in comparison? That on this night when the disciples, the church and the world were at their worst that Jesus is at his best and offers his best: himself? One friend will sell him out for 3 month's salary, the rest will run away as fast their feet can carry them and the supposedly bravest disciple will not just once but three times deny he even knows him. The church of Jesus' day will curse him and count him worthy of death, and the government will find him innocent and yet scourge him and sentence him to an excruciating death.

Yet it's on this night that Jesus offers this lasting legacy? Why not after Peter had said, “Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life? Or after that same disciple declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”? Or perhaps at the commissioning of the 72 when he sent them out 2 by 2: wouldn't that have been a great time to give them this gift as they left for their mission trips? But no. Jesus' timing—God's timing—is always perfect. And so when the world is at its worst, Jesus is at his best. What did he offer the disciples? 2000 years later, what does he offer us? This is his last will and testament. What treasures does he have to offer? He hasn't accumulated the estate of an everyday millionaire. There is no 3000 sq foot beautifully landscaped house up in Galilee, no retirement account or pension, no Metropolitan Life insurance policy.

And so, having nothing, Jesus gives them...what? Having nothing, Jesus gives them himself. And really, that's everything. It's his true body, there with the bread. It's his true blood, there in that cup of wine. It's the Savior, the God-man who in a matter of hours they would see hanging on a cross, his battered body covered in blood. And 3 days later, it's that risen Savior who would appear to them in another room, a locked room. And now, right now in this room, this is exactly what he gives them. Listen to their Jesus—listen to your Jesus: “When he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

What did the disciples receive in that upper room legacy? What will we receive here today? It's so obvious, yet such a mystery. The Savior himself, and all that he brings with him: his body

which he gave up death—for us. His very blood which he shed—for us. That's yours. That's mine. And now when your God—your almighty, righteous, holy God looks at you, this is what he sees: He sees Jesus. Not you. Not your sins. Not the sins of your youth, not your sins of yesterday, not your sins of today. Not your guilt, not your shame. Not the bitterness in your heart or your roller coaster of doubt. He sees Jesus: the friend of sinners. He sees Jesus: the very Son of God. He sees Jesus: the Son in whom he is well pleased. And now, because of Jesus, he is so very well pleased with you.

Jesus' deathbed legacy?

He grabbed a bowl of water and offered a humble example of love.

And then having nothing else to offer, he gave himself. And having that, we have all we need. Tonight, desire nothing other than our Savior. Crave Jesus. Cling to Jesus. Jesus will never disappoint you. Amen.

Pastor David Wenzel