

“Learning to Kneel”

John 13: 1-17

Today, on this so-called Maundy Thursday, we are drawn into one of the most intimate and disorienting moments in the Gospel: Jesus kneeling on the floor, taking a towel, and washing the feet of his disciples.

It is a simple act. Quiet. Almost ordinary. And yet, it overturns everything.

At Augsburg University, we are no strangers to the language of vocation, neighbor love, and service. These words are woven into classrooms, residence halls, athletic teams, and community partnerships across this campus.

But on this day, Jesus presses us deeper.

Because what he does is not just “service” as we often understand it—not a project, not a requirement, not even a well-organized day of volunteering.

He kneels.

And in doing so, he redefines what it means to lead, to love, and to belong.

We have to remember what foot-washing meant in his time. It was the task of a servant—the lowest servant. It was physical, intimate, and, frankly, uncomfortable.

And Jesus chooses to do it on the night before everything falls apart. On the night before betrayal. On the night before the cross. He does not assert authority. He does not defend himself. He kneels.

Peter resists, as many of us would. “You will never wash my feet.”

Because this is not how power works. It’s not how success works. It’s not how we’ve been taught to navigate the world—even here, where we talk so often about service.

If we’re honest, many of us—students, faculty, staff—are much more comfortable achieving and giving than receiving. Much more comfortable helping than being helped. We pride ourselves on resilience, independence, making it through.

But Jesus says, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” In other words, this is not optional. This is the heart of the matter.

So today, before we rush to the call to serve, we have to pause with something harder:

Can we receive this?

Can all of us—so capable, so committed, so often carrying so much—allow ourselves to be served?

To be seen in the dust and weariness of late nights, financial stress, family responsibilities, questions about the future, the quiet loneliness that can settle in even in a busy place?

Can we let Christ draw near—not to evaluate us, not to measure us, but simply to love us?
Because that is what this moment reveals about God.

God is the one who kneels. God is the one who comes close—close enough to touch the places
we would rather hide. Close enough to say: you belong, even here.

And then, having done this, Jesus turns to his disciples—and to us—and says: “You also ought
to wash one another’s feet.”

And suddenly, this is no longer just about a moment in an upper room long ago.

It is about life on this campus.

It might look like a student who notices the classmate who hasn’t spoken all semester—and
makes space for their voice.

It might look like choosing patience over judgment in a group project that isn’t going well.

It might look like showing up for a teammate, a roommate, a colleague—not because it’s
convenient, but because it’s needed.

It might look like crossing the boundaries that can so easily divide us—race, culture, language,
politics—and choosing to listen, to learn, to honor the dignity of another.

It might look like the quiet, unseen acts that never make it onto a résumé—but change
someone’s life.

And here is the part we cannot miss: Jesus washes the feet of people who will fail him.

Who will misunderstand him.

Who will abandon him.

Who will deny him.

He even washes the feet of the one who will betray him.

Which means that the call to love—right here at Augsburg—is not limited to those who are easy
to love.

It extends to the difficult roommate.

The frustrating classmate.

The person who sees the world very differently than you do.

It extends to all of us.

This is not easy. In fact, it may be one of the hardest things we are asked to do. But it is also
where the deepest transformation happens.

Because a community shaped by this kind of love—this kneeling, towel-in-hand love—becomes
something different.

It becomes a place where people are not just known for what they achieve, but for how they
care.

A place where dignity is not earned, but honored.

A place where the presence of Christ is not just proclaimed, but embodied.

So today, we stand—or perhaps we kneel—at the intersection of grace and calling.

We are washed. And we are sent to wash.

We are loved. And we are called to love in the same way.

And so we leave with this question:

Where are you being invited to kneel?

Not someday. Not in theory. But this week.

In your classes.

In your residence halls.

In your work.

In your relationships.

Whose feet—literal or figurative—are you being asked to wash?

Because in the end, Maundy Thursday is not just about what Jesus did.

It is about who we are becoming.

A people shaped by humility. A community grounded in love. A university that knows how to kneel.

May we have the courage to receive that love.

And may we have the grace to share it. Amen.