

Do This

I Corinthians 11: 23-26

John 13: 31b-35

[Maundy Thursday, 5 April 2007, Augsburg College Chapel]

- I was about to enter my first Lenten season as pastor of First Lutheran Church, and as was my custom, I called my experienced pastor dad to get some tips. He didn't have much to say except for these two suggestions: on Ash Wednesday, make sure that you keep a damp cloth nearby when imposing the ashes, because they are a real mess; and on Maundy Thursday be sure to recruit at least one volunteer for the foot-washing, otherwise you might be standing there for a long time with no feet to wash!
- At the moment, those good (and very helpful) tips seemed pretty mundane, but in retrospect I wonder if dad wasn't offering me a pretty profound summary of the meaning of Lent – and indeed, of the life of faith...
- On Ash Wednesday, we are marked with the ashes as a sign of our mortality, our brokenness – we remember that we have come from dust and to dust we shall return – we acknowledge the messiness of our lives (messiness that a damp cloth cannot begin to undo)
- And today, on this day we call Maundy Thursday, the first of the three days of Easter, we are offered glimpses of how God's promise to us has been fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus, who prepares to leave us by offering us an example, by asking us to remember him, by giving us a commandment for living once he is gone – and we don't quite know what to do with all that – we sometimes have trouble remembering – we certainly won't volunteer to have our feet washed!
- Our task together this morning – gathered as God's people – is to remember and to hear the commandment again. This odd word "Maundy," from the Latin *mandatum*, translated as mandate or commandment. And this beautiful, elegant phrase we hear in our communion liturgy each week: "Do this in remembrance of me." This is how we commence the three days of Easter: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Do this – live as I have lived – in remembrance of me. Listen to the voice of Jesus – welcoming us at table, teaching us to love, perhaps even pleading with us to remember. The pleading of our Lord who is about to die a horrible death. Do this, my brothers and sisters in faith.
- Do this. Gather together around the table to enjoy the fellowship, to receive forgiveness, to know your Lord in the breaking of bread and sipping of drink. This is my body given for you, my blood shed for you. Be joyful. I watch with wonder as our children, Thomas and Maya, now come to the Lord's table each Sunday at our church. I see their gleeful expressions as they receive the sacrament. Oh that we could remember and rekindle such joy. Whenever you come together at this table, for this supper, I will be with you, Jesus tells his disciples and us. Be happy – enjoy each others' company – celebrate, perhaps even dance a bit. Here is the bread and the cup, broken for you, shed for you – for your salvation. Do this in remembrance of me.
- Do this. Wash the dust from each others' feet. Be servants to each other. Enter into the intimacy and grace of relationship with each other. Other than my three or

four years of washing feet with my flock in Indiana, I hadn't much heard anyone talk about footwashing until a few weeks ago when one of our Presidential scholar prospective students, in response to a question about meaningful leadership experiences, recounted a retreat where adult counselors had washed the feet of the youth participants. She said when they were finished, she and a young friend proceeded to return the favor to the counselors, which made the entire ritual incredibly moving and grace-filled. That is how it works. Do this. Serve each other in the most concrete ways – return the favor. Live this way. Do this.

- Do this. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. Remember me as you love one another, Jesus tells his disciples. This is how you must live as I depart from you. Do not forget. I witness such love in our college community each and every day, as we teach and serve and care for each other – as we do the Lord's work in our neighborhood and world – as we are sent forth to be God's faithful people in our various callings.
- I've taught you how, Jesus reminds us. Gather at table, wash each others' feet, love one another. And when the meal is finished, go from here with these words in your hearts and minds, to be my disciples in all you say and do. This is how the world will know you as mine. Do this.
- These, then, are God's gifts to God's faithful people. A commandment, to love one another. A table, at which to gather and remember. A covenant, to forgive and redeem.
- Do this – gather, serve and love – in remembrance of me.
- God keep you in these three days. Amen.