

## Maundy Thursday sermon – Thursday April 9th

Served by the **BEST!**

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Imagine this scene: Picture that you work in a restaurant washing dishes. You spend your days standing at a big stainless steel sink, wearing an apron, cleaning plates. The air is hot and steamy. There's perspiration on your brow and on the back of your neck.

One day you are working the evening shift, stacking dishes, when a courier arrives at the back door. "The owner won't be back until tomorrow," you tell him.

"I'm not looking for the owner," he says, "I'm looking for you."

"Huh?"

"I'm from the White House," he says. You think to yourself: That explains the dark suit, the briefcase, and the sunglasses.

He opens his briefcase, and says, "I came to deliver this letter to you."

Part of you wonders what you've done wrong. Another part of you wonders if this isn't a joke. Yet, mostly you think this guy, has the wrong guy.

You dry your hands on your apron and take the letter. It's a personal letter. There is an emblem on the envelope and your name is *written* in cursive -- not typed.

The stationery is the heavy expensive type. You open the letter ... and ...well ... how-do-you-like-that -- it's a letter from the President of the United States of America.

You look up at the guy who brought it, and he's smiling -- like this is the part of his job he likes the best.

It's an invitation -- an invitation to a dinner. A state dinner. A dinner given in your honor. A dinner dedicated to you.

You can't remember when anyone has had a dinner for you. And now the Commander in Chief wants to!

"What's the catch," you ask. The man in the dark suit says, "No catch, just a request that you come to the White House. May I give the President your answer? ... Can you come to the dinner?" he asks.

"Well, of cuh-cuh-course! I'd love to go," you say.

And so you go. On the night of the dinner, a limousine pulls up to your door and takes you to the airport. You fly to Washington D.C., and another limousine takes you to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. You are met out front by more black suits who escort you in. Inside, a man in a tuxedo takes over and leads you down a hall lined with the portraits of past presidents.

At the end of the hall is the banquet room. In the center of the room is a long table, and in the center of the table is ONE plate, and beside the plate is one name -- YOURS. The butler in the tux, motions for you to sit, and when you do, he leaves. Then, you DO the thing you've WANTED to do since you entered the White House. You look around and say, "WOW!"

<p><b>We live in a SELF- Service world.</b></p> <p><b>“Do unto others as you’d have them do unto you.” ~ Jesus</b></p>	<p>You’ve never seen a table this long. You’ve never seen crystal this nice. You’ve never seen china this valuable. You’ve never seen a setting with so many forks, or a candelabra with so many candles.</p> <p>Over your head is a chandelier with a billion pieces of glass. The table and chairs are made of polished teak.</p> <p>Straight ahead is a hearth with a fire and marble mantle. Above the mantle is a painting – a painting of, (gulp) – a painting of YOU! That’s YOU up there. Same eyes, same goofy smile, same nose you wish was half the size – that’s <i>you</i>.</p> <p>A voice from behind you says, “I keep it there so I can remember you.” You don’t have to turn and look to see who it is. You’ve heard that voice hundreds of times on TV. You wait until he is right beside you before you look up. You know he’s there because he places his hand on your shoulder.</p> <p>You turn and look ... and there he is, the President. He’s a bit shorter than you imagined, but every bit as authoritative. The square jaw. The deep eyes. The dark suit. The red tie. The apron.</p> <p>The WHAT? The President is wearing an apron! A common kitchen apron just like YOU wear washing dishes at the restaurant.</p> <p>And, as if that isn’t enough, behind him is a DINNER CART. He reaches for your bread plate and gives you a dinner roll. He says, “I’m so glad you could come and be my guest.”</p> <p>You thought it was <b>shocking</b> to get the invitation. You thought it was <b>amazing</b> to see the White House. Your jaw hit the floor when you saw <b>your picture</b> on the wall. But all that was nothing compared with <b>THIS</b>.</p> <p>The Commander in Chief as a waiter? The most powerful man in the world ... humbly serving you food? YOU work in the restaurant, and HE’S the top dog. But he wears the apron and says, “Today, I honor you.”</p> <p>That story is by author Max Lucado. It’s kinda a crazy story. This kind of stuff doesn’t happen ... or does it?</p> <p>It doesn’t happen in our world – at least, not normally. <b>We live in a SELF- Service world.</b> A world where people look out only for themselves. Don’t believe me? Just try to buy a package of toilet paper these days. You won’t find any. Why? Because no one wants to be left without so everyone has hoarded their own stash. They’re serving self.</p> <p>We live in a Me-First, Dog-eat-dog world.</p> <p>Jesus said, <b>“Do unto others as you’d have them do unto you.”</b> That’s the Golden Rule. The idea is to treat others the best as possible. But for many people, it’s: <b>“Do unto others <u>before they do unto you.</u>”</b> Hurt others first so they can’t hurt you.</p> <p>We live in a world where people will take advantage of you. Scammers call your phone constantly. They even try to take advantage of situations like the pandemic we are in, to play on the sympathy of decent folks, to get ahold of your bank information so they can clean you out!</p> <p>For other folks, they serve themselves by putting others down. It makes them feel bigger, or more important if they verbally tear down someone else’s self-esteem.</p>
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**Where did you learn to serve? From the disciples, or from Jesus?**

In short, a SELF service world, has very little love for others, and very little respect for other human beings.

But God's desire is that you and I be different. He wants us to follow Jesus by living as He lived. God's desire is that Jesus' loving us and giving Himself for us, *changes us* to love others, and give ourselves in service to one another.

Let me ask you: **Where did you learn to serve ... from the disciples, or from Jesus?** You see, in that Upper Room on the first Maundy Thursday, the disciples and Jesus had very different ideas of service, didn't they? They gathered for a meal. When Jewish people sat down to eat, washing was very important. They washed their hands, their pots, bowls, and cups in a special ceremonial way. The washing was a symbol, a sign, a reminder – a reminder that they were to have a clean heart. God didn't really, really care that they had clean cups. God DID care that their conscience and their guilt was to be washed clean. How? Not with soap and water. Instead, everyday they were to confess their sins and guilt, and be washed clean with God's amazing forgiveness.

So, washing was practiced at every meal. But THIS night, in the Upper Room – this was a special meal. Jesus gathered His disciples to celebrate the Passover.

For us, Thanksgiving Dinner, or Christmas Dinner, and maybe Easter Dinner – not this year, but most years – those dinners are BIG deals. On a normal night you may grab a burger at the drive through on the way to soccer practice. But not on Thanksgiving or Christmas. The relatives come over. Maybe not right now, but we hope we can have family over again soon. We hope that again soon, family recipes, passed down for generations, will be prepared. We hope that those traditions that you do every year for special occasions – will continue.

Well, even if we can't get together like that this year, you get the idea. Passover is not an everyday meal. It's one of those special celebrations, with special traditions.

One traditions that *had* to be done was the washing of feet. I won't try it this year. I won't ask you to put your foot up to the TV screen and I will "virtually wash" them. But, in Jesus' day, everyone would have noticed if this wasn't done. Everyone would have noticed if the foot washing wasn't done!

These days, we wash our hands. People in Jesus' day, washed their hands AND feet. They lived in a time when they walked everywhere on dusty, dirty roads. So their feet were filthy, gross and smelly.

As you can imagine, washing feet was a stinky job. Usually the owner of the house arranged for a servant to do it. But since this was a private party that night – just Jesus and the disciples – there was no servant. But the wash basin, the jug of water, and the linen towel came supplied with the room. The foot washing equipment would have been– sitting by the door.

The disciples must have noticed the water, basin, and the apron. They must have noticed that no servant was there to do the job. They knew this was a special meal and the job should be done by one

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of them. But none of the disciples would stoop so low to do this dirty job. None of them would serve the others.

Let me ask you: **Do you want others to serve you?** Is your mind more often on what others are doing *for you*, than on what you are doing for *others*? Is your concern more for what you are *receiving* rather than on what you are *giving* to others?

Let's be honest, often we want others to serve *us*. And we only serve others when we have to. Our attention is on ourselves.

In the Bible, the book of Luke tells us that the tension in the Upper Room that night was so thick that the disciples actually started arguing about who was considered the greatest of them. I can hear them saying, “I’m not going to wash *your* feet. I’m more important than you are, so *you* do it!”

There’s an old saying: ***“You are never too small for God to use. But you can be too big for God to use.”*** Too often that describes you and me.

**Our pride is in our way.** We think and act like we could screw in a light bulb by just holding it up in the air – because the whole world revolves around us.

Maybe you ARE willing to serve other people, but you want something in return. There should be some kind of reward, or a big enough pay check for putting other people first.

In the covid-19 pandemic that’s going on now, I think all of us are getting a new appreciation for doctors and nurses, respiratory therapists and first responders who are on the very front lines dealing with this terrible, killing virus. We are seeing on TV many stories of medical providers who are really putting themselves at risk to help the sick. They are working long hours, not able to go home, or see or hug family members. Their serving goes above and beyond whatever amount of money they might get back in a paycheck. And if I just described you as a nurse or a medical technician or first responder – then please know – we are deeply, deeply thankful for you!

See often we just don’t want to stoop so low as to serve others. But then, if we do serve, we want it worth our while. I want **something in return. It’s** “I’ll help you IF you help me.” “I’ll scratch your back, if you’ll scratch mine.” You know, friend, that’s not really serving others – that’s just serving YOURSELF!

How about you? When you serve other people **Do you want something in return?** Do you want other people to notice? Think you deserve a special break for what you’ve done? Do you want God to notice? Want something **from God as a pay back?**

There are a lot of religions that teach that you have to do something to get in God’s good graces. Whether it’s blow yourself up and kill innocent people to get to heaven, or go to confession and say the rosary, or give a little money in the offering and be an usher in church – whatever it is, if it’s done to win God’s favor, friend, it’s wrong.

Sometimes we can be feeding the hungry, all the while hoping God is taking notice and giving us extra brownie points. Many churches teach that Jesus died on the cross to win your forgiveness, only to get you started, and the rest is up to you to earn by good deeds.

It's a religion where you are on stage serving and God is in the audience being served.

Friends, the exact OPPOSITE is true! God is THE ONE acting and giving and forgiving – and you are just a receiver of His amazing grace. He serves you, more than we can understand or appreciate!

Let's face it: often we follow the pattern of the disciples. We want others to serve us, our pride gets in our way, we want something in return from others, and we want something in return from God. All of that is SELF service. It's wrong. It's sinful. For this we deserve only God's anger, His punishment, and an eternity separated from Him in hell.

That night in the Upper Room, Jesus, however, showed a different pattern of service. Jesus didn't show self-service. He put their needs before His, and lovingly gave Himself.

Normally, a servant would wash the guest's feet as they entered, before they sat down at the table. Once the feast started, the people really weren't supposed to get up and interrupt the meal. Since none of the disciples was willing to do the foot washing, they all sat down with dirty feet. Jesus, however, GOT UP from the table to wash all 24 smelly feet. This really would have stood out – everyone would have noticed that Jesus GOT UP from the table to wash feet.

He didn't have to do this. Jesus did it willingly. It was an act of love to His disciples.

That night Jesus took off His outer garment – His long flowing robe. He tied a towel around His waist. So He would have been dressed very much like a servant or a slave in those times. How humble! Can you imagine - the King of the Universe, willingly becomes a slave?!

People in those days didn't sit at tables like we do today. They were laying on couch cushions, leaning on their left elbows, with their heads close to one another and the food on a low table. Their feet would be sticking out away from the table like spokes on a wheel. Jesus, left the conversation, went to the edges of the room where their feet were, and went around that room washing every foot.

Jesus probably hasn't washed your feet. But He HAS served you. The next day, Good Friday, Jesus served YOU, by giving His life for you. No one *forced* Him to go to the cross. He did it Willingly. Jesus said, ***"No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord."*** He CHOSE to give His life for you.

Why did He do it? Because His love for you is so deep and strong! He would rather die for you, than to see you suffer eternal hell. He would rather give His life *for* you, than live in heaven *without* you.

On that cross, Jesus gave His life as a condemned criminal. He gave up all He had, all the honor, glory, and fame that He deserved, and He made Himself nothing – for YOU. Humbly

In the end, from the cross Jesus cried out, ***"It is finished!"*** All the payment for your wrongs, was made. All the punishment you deserve for your sins was completed. There is nothing left for you to earn – no brownie points to win from God. Forgiveness, hope for tomorrow, a new and different way to live, heaven to come – all are paid for IN FULL. Jesus offers them to you as His free gifts. Just receive them.

***"No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord."***

**Don't Admire Jesus' service ... FOLLOW HIM !**

***"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."***

You know, if I were in that Upper Room that night, I probably would have said, "Wow! Look at what Jesus is doing! Isn't that amazing that God would wash feet." I'd end up admiring Jesus for what He'd done. But Jesus Himself TOLD US WHY HE DID THIS. *Don't Admire Jesus' service ... FOLLOW HIM !* He said, "Don't admire Me." He said, ***"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."***

See, by washing the feet, Jesus isn't rebuking His disciples or criticizing them. HE IS GIVING THEM A GIFT! Jesus wants His disciples – you included – to have the most joyful, most blessed life possible. If you go around with a SELF service attitude, how will you be? You'll be MISERABLE! But if you live your life serving others out of the overflowing love of Jesus which He has given you, you will receive Peace, joy, contentment. It's more blessed to give than to receive. Jesus wants you to have those gifts. So He says, "don't admire me ... Do as I have done for you." FOLLOW HIM. Be like Jesus.

To share Jesus' love because He first loved us. To love others deep enough that I want to give even the lowliest kind of service to them. To put others first and serve them – at home, maybe a neighbor, the hungry and the lonely and the depressed – those who don't know Jesus. THIS is life, LIFE to the full. Lasting joy.

Amen.