

Maundy Thursday 2026: "Feet, Love, and the Touch of Christ"

John 13:1-17, 31b-38

April 2, 2026

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

If our children knew more of the Bible at the age when they detest baths, I can imagine them saying to Mom or Dad who's running the tub or standing there with a fresh bath towel, "But **Jesus** says if I my feet are clean, that's good enough!" True, our Lord **did** say to Simon Peter, "*One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean.*" (John 13:10b) However, Jesus was probably referring to the practice of washing the dirt of the road off of one's feet before entering a friend's home, not to actual bath time, whatever that looked like 2,000 years ago.

The Gospel is very sensory, including all 5 senses. Just as Jesus literally fed people with loaves and fishes which they tasted, just as Jairus' daughter literally heard Jesus' voice and felt His hand as He took her by the hand and commanded/invited/encouraged her, "Little girl, get up!", just as Martha feared the smell of Lazarus' decomposition after 4 days in the tomb, just as the crowd saw Lazarus stumble forth from the tomb when Jesus commanded, "Lazarus, come out!", Jesus literally washed His disciples' feet. Especially since we're currently concerned about and praying for at least 50,000 members of our armed forces deployed to the Middle East, a military example seems fitting tonight. In 1917, in the midst of WW I, a historical novel titled *The Beloved Captain* was published. Its author was Donald Hankey, an Englishman whose writing drew upon his own life experiences. He wrote of "the beloved captain," "We all knew instinctively that he was our superior – a man of finer fibre than ourselves... I suppose that was why he could be so humble without loss of dignity."¹ Then he describes the attention paid by "the beloved captain" to the condition of the men's feet. The man not only examined the feet of the soldiers under his command; if there were a problem, he addressed it himself, including personally lancing their blisters.

There was no affectation about this, no striving after effect. It was simply that he felt that our feet were pretty important, and that he knew that we were pretty careless. So he thought it best at the start to see to the matter himself. Nevertheless, there was in our eyes something almost religious about this care of our feet. **It seemed to have a touch of Christ about it**, and we loved and honoured him the more.²

(Think of this the next time you have a pedicure, visit the podiatrist, or wash a child's feet!)

In order to wash His disciples' feet, Jesus must have knelt down. What a beautiful sight and stark reminder that *"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20:28) In order to kneel and get up again without tripping on His own robe, our Lord *"took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself."* (John 13:4) The word for *"took off"* is the same for *"laid down,"* as in John 10:

*"The good shepherd **lays down** his life for the sheep... ¹⁵ ...I **lay down** my life for the sheep... ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I **lay down** my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I **lay it down** of my own accord. I have power to **lay it down**, and I have power to take it up again."*

Jesus' loving humility in **taking off** His outer robe and kneeling to wash His friends' feet is nothing compared to Jesus' loving humility in dying on the cross. That **laying down** of life, that total self-emptying (*kenosis*) is described and praised by St. Paul in his letter to the faithful in Philippi:

2 If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

*⁶ who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a human,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,
¹⁰ so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,*

*in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 11 and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.*

We gather as a faith family created by Christ through Holy Baptism, tonight, tomorrow night, Saturday night, to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Tomorrow night we will again hear the story of His suffering and death, then bend the knee before our crucified Lord. On Saturday night we'll gather among the gravestones in our little churchyard and witness the lighting of the Easter fire, symbolizing our Lord's blazing forth from the tomb. In doing so we claim the power of our Lord's resurrection for ourselves and for all who have gone before us, including those 19th c. Presbyterian saints buried in what is now "our" cemetery, and the Jewish and Christian loved ones now inurned in our columbaria and interred in our garden. (Since Jesus was Jewish, it's always seemed fitting that the first cremains inurned in our columbarium were those of Ira Wallace, Joan's husband, who worshiped with us regularly. There is a star of David inscribed on Ira's niche. It was his wish that his remains be kept here.)

We honor our Lord by our presence and participation during this Triduum, these Three Holy Days. But ultimately this worship is meaningful to the extent that it compels us to live our faith out loud the rest of the year. Ultimately LOVE is the simple, profound meaning of the footwashing and of our Lord's death on the cross to which it points. Hence the *mandatum*, the command from which Maundy Thursday gets its name: "*I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13:34-35) Someone has said, "There are for us not 10 commandments but 11. And the last is, 'Thou shalt love.'"³ The extent to which we love even and especially in the most difficult of circumstances in the year ahead is the true gauge of our heart-appreciation for "What wondrous love is this." Amen

¹Quoted in William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2, *Daily Study Bible Series*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 140.

²Ibid.

³*Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 8, *Luke/John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1952), p. 693.