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Second Baptist Church of Lincoln, NE
Sermon for Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2009

SERVENT LEADERSHIP
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

There are two life sized figures outside of Cooper Hall at Sterling College in Sterling, KS. One is the figure of Peter and the other is of Jesus. Jesus is washing the feet of Peter. The message of the sculpture is Servant Leadership.

On this night, around 2,000 years ago, Jesus has his Last Supper with his disciples. It was an agape meal – a love feast. He desired to have this last love feast with them because he knew that his time was short. It was the first Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from the Latin word for "commandment" and refers to the new commandment Jesus gave to his followers, to love one another as Jesus loved them (John 13:34). Jesus said those words after he assumed the role of a servant and washed the feet of the disciples.

Jesus was the host of this Last Supper. According to the synoptic gospels he had arranged for the Passover meal and place asking the disciples earlier to go and make preparations, which they did. I suppose Jesus also could have arranged for a servant to do the customary foot washing of the day but he didn't. Perhaps he was testing the disciples to see if they had learned the lessons he had been trying to teach them. Anyway, when they came together in the place that had been prepared none of them assumed that responsibility. So Jesus did. The disciples were shocked to see him do this. I imagine silence prevailed over the room as they saw what Jesus was doing. We don't know which disciple's Jesus first washed but when he came to Peter, he cried out, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Then Peter, humbled, and expressing his deep need to be a part of Jesus, said, "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well." Jesus replied that was not necessary because a person who has bathed is clean and needs only to wash his feet. "And you are clean," he said, "though not every one of you." He was referring to Judas who was going to betray him. He also washed the feet of Judas. Can you imagine what might have gone through Judas' mind as Jesus washed his feet? Can you imagine how Jesus might have looked at him, not saying a word but simply washing his feet? Of course I don't think Judas knew what the outcome of his action might be but Jesus did. If Judas had known what the outcome would have been I wonder what he would have done.

Anyway, when Jesus finished washing the disciples' feet he drove home the lesson he had been teaching. He said, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed

your feet, you should wash one another's feet. 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, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them...A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All...will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another." How did Jesus love his disciples? How does he love us? William Barclay has written how he believes Jesus loved his disciples.

- 1) He loved his disciples *selflessly*. Jesus has no conditions to his love. We sometimes tell our children that if they are good we will love them more. Or, has anyone ever said, "So and so won't love me now because I have been bad or I did the wrong thing?" That is selfish love, its love with strings attached. Jesus loved his disciples *selflessly*. There were no strings attached. He did not say, "I will love you if..." His one desire was to give himself and all he had for those he loved.
- 2) Jesus loved his disciples *sacrificially*...if love meant the Cross; Jesus was prepared to go there. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that love is meant to give us happiness. So in the end it does, but love may well bring pain and demand a cross.
- 3) Jesus loved his disciples *understandingly*. He knew his disciples through and through...and he still loved them. Sometimes we say that love is blind. That is not so, for the love that is blind can end in nothing but bleak and utter disillusionment. Real love is open-eyed. It loves, not what it imagines you to be, but what you are. The heart of Jesus is big enough to love us as we are.
- 4) Jesus loved his disciples *forgivingly*. Peter would deny him. They would all forsake him in his hour of need. They never, in the days of his flesh, really understood him. They were blind and insensitive, slow to learn, and lacking in understanding. In the end they were craven cowards. But Jesus held nothing against them; there was no failure which he could not forgive. The love which has not learned to forgive cannot do anything but shrivel and die. We are poor creatures, and there is a kind of fate in things which makes us hurt most of all those who love us best. For that very reason all enduring love must be built on forgiveness, for without forgiveness it is bound to die.

5) I would add to Barclay's list that Jesus loved his disciples extravagantly or wastefully. He did not love the disciples according to their merits. He loved them according to God's kind of love.

This is what Servant Leadership is. Jesus, our Servant Leader, served with love - selflessly, sacrificially, understandingly, forgivingly and extravagantly or wastefully.

He took off his outer robe, girded himself with a towel, poured water from a pitcher in a basin and washed the feet of his disciples.

We who are called to be leaders in the church are called to follow his example and be servant leaders. I have wondered what we might use to show servant leadership in our day and time; perhaps an apron? I don't know. It could be very meaningful – as well as symbolic, to have some symbol that we could wear as we serve in various responsibilities in the church that would remind us that we are to serve as Jesus served. This same symbol could be used as new officers are installed and those continuing in office ever year could choose to pick up and put on as a commitment or renewed commitment in their servant leadership. The important part is to show it in our attitude. By this will all know that we are his disciples in that we love one another as Christ has loved us.

This is the message for Maundy Thursday. To God be the glory. Amen!