

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 13:1-17, 31-35
 I Corinthians 11:23-26
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

Maundy Thursday – What Does Love Look Like in the Hands of God?

“God is love.” Jesus came into this world with a message of total love. How did that work out? Tonight’s Gospel text from John tells us, **“Having loved his own who were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end.”** That end is spelled “c-r-o-s-s.” **What does love look like in the hands of God?**

On that first, ancient Maundy Thursday night, when Jesus and his disciples gathered in the upper room to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover, **God’s love looked like this:**

- **Foot washing** – Jesus, the great teacher, **God himself**, knelt and washed the dirt from the bare feet of his rough and rowdy followers. This was slave work. Only the lowest in society could be asked to perform such a service. Think about your feet right now. Picture Jesus kneeling there holding and washing them. Jesus getting down on his hands and knees for you. **That’s what love in the hands of God looks like.**
- **Bread sharing** – Jesus used ordinary table fare – bread and wine – gifts from our Creator, to feed those folks for that day, to remind them of how God had loved and cared for them in the past. Jesus took those fruits of the earth and together with his own body and blood fed those folks for that day and forever, promising that God would love and care for them in the future – to the death and beyond. Can you see Jesus waiting for you at this table tonight? **That’s what love in the hands of God looks like.**
- **Nail holding** – The same hands of God that washed feet soiled by everyday life, that fed hungry mouths – those hands also grasped the wicked spikes driven by a world that teaches us that there is no God. The spikes were driven by a world that teaches every man, woman and child for themselves. By a world that is better at building walls and driving wedges than it is at building bridges and repairing cracks. Look at your own hands. Picture a jagged hole with a railroad spike sticking out of it. **That’s how love looks in the hands of God.**
- **Hand holding** – Jesus held the hands of those disciples gathered around that table that night. Then he died. But in a little while he

came back and held their hands again, as together they brought God's word of love into a world that so desperately needs it. Look at your hand again. Can you see Jesus' hand holding yours tonight? **That's what love in the hands of God looks like – your hand in God's hand.**

Tonight ten fifth graders will be celebrating their First Holy Communion with their families and with their church family. Sharing in the Lord's Supper will be new and exciting for them. For their parents, and for those of us who have been beaten up by some of the loveless things in the world and in our lives, Holy Communion becomes more than just a nice thing to do. For me Holy Communion is **life-giving**, as Jesus himself rolls up his sleeves and feeds me with the **true bread of life, himself**. This meal from God gives **what we most need** when we're keeping our head down in a foxhole, when we are going under the doctor's knife, when we have lost our job, when our marriage is struggling... Do you know what I mean?

After Jesus finished washing the disciples' feet, he asked them, "**Do you know what I have done for you?**" **GOD** just fed them, washed their feet and then headed for the world's worst death for them. Is there anywhere that God won't go for God's precious and beloved children, for you? What difference does it make when **you** head out into the world each morning? Do you know that the God who gives you that day will also be your **constant, faithful and loving companion**? Do you ever think about that? Is there anything too big for God to handle? **When we figure out, remember, that the One who loves us most in all creation is with us every day – we start to look like love in the hands of God.**

Did you notice that Jesus "took off his outer robe" before washing the disciples' feet? **Jesus stripped himself down** in order to enter into every unclean/dirty place where we have ever found ourselves. There is no too-bad place for Jesus to show up and bring about God's good in our lives. Do you believe that? A little later, **Jesus was stripped down by our hateful world, by our own actions**, in order to be hung on the cross for our love and salvation. Jesus took on our worst and last enemy death. Jesus got buried in the ground for us. But that's not the end of the story is it?

Tonight you are invited to dine at the Table of the Lord. Which Lord?

- The Lord who gave you the full moon last night, the sunrise this morning and that breath that you just inhaled,
- The Lord who brought you into this world, this day and this place,
- The Lord who carries you through school, work, family life and world,
- The Lord who held onto you when you lost a loved one, failed a test and when drugs or alcohol got a strangle hold on you,
- The Lord who hung spread eagle on the cross and said, “**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,**”
- The One who does slave work, death work and resurrection work to show you **just how precious you are to God.**

Tonight you are invited to dine at the Table of the Lord.

Do you know the story called “**Scars in Life?**” It goes like this.

Some years ago on a hot summer day in south Florida a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his house. He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore. His mother in the house looked out the window and saw the danger that he was in. In utter fear, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could.

Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed, turned and swam back toward shore. It was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. That led to an incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but she was much too passionate to let go. A farmer happened by, heard her screams, raced from his truck and shot the alligator.

Remarkably, after weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred by the vicious attack of the animal. And, on his arms were deep scratches where his mother’s fingernails dug into his flesh in her effort to hang onto the son that she loved. A newspaper reporter later interviewed the little boy. He asked to see the scars from the alligator. The little boy showed him his legs, but then with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, “**But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms too. I have them because my Mom wouldn’t let me go.**”

True story? I don’t know. Do you have any scars from the world trying to drag you down? Maybe you have some scars too, from God not being willing to let you go... You are here tonight.

It was the first Maundy Thursday. Feet were washed. Supper was done. Jesus was headed for the cross. Here's what he told those first believers. **"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."**

What does love look like in the hands of God? It looks like you and me, the fifth graders, First Lutheran... Jesus promised... Thanks be to God. Amen.