

Tonight we remember. We remember that on this night Jesus knelt at the feet of his friends and in the ancient way of hospitality washed their feet. We remember that on the night before he died Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, blessed, broke and gave it to his disciples. Then he blessed the cup of wine and shared this too with his companions. We also remember that on this night Jesus went to the Garden of Gethesmane, where he prayed asking that the cup of suffering might pass but in the end asked only that God's will be done.

Tonight we remember that first Jesus offered the humblest gesture of welcome to his friends. It was not the hosts role to wash the feet of dinner guests. This is the work of servants. Was Jesus washing the feet of his friends that they might be prepared to stand on the holy ground of his suffering? Tonight we remember that Jesus blessed the bread. Broke it and gave it to his friends. He blessed the cup of wine and shared it. Jesus asked that this holy meal be a remembrance for all time. Was Jesus nourishing his disciples and friends for all time so that each of us might find the strength to share in his suffering?

Tonight we remember that Jesus prayed. He went to the Garden in the company of his companions and asked them to pray while he went a little distance from them to pray in solitude. There is a sense of foreboding in each of the Gospel narrative descriptions of this event. Was Jesus inviting his companions then and for all time to bring all their deepest dread and suffering to God?

The Scriptures bring us this night to the alpha and omega point, the beginning and the end point of Jesus ministry on earth. It is the night when all that Jesus has alluded to during his teaching and healing work draws together. The disciples are no longer on lookers but participants. The disciples will stumble through the days ahead, uncertain and fearful, but mindful of all that Jesus has said and done. The events of this night begin the Passion of Christ.

This is our story, our narrative. We are the followers of Jesus and call ourselves Christians. The questions we have formed each have a positive response. Was Jesus washing the feet of his friends that they might be prepared to stand on the holy ground of his suffering? Yes.

Was Jesus nourishing his disciples and friends for all time so that each of us might find the strength to share in his suffering? Yes.

Was Jesus inviting his companions then and for all time to bring all their deepest dread and suffering to God? Yes.

Tonight, I invite you to respond to Jesus invitation to prepare to stand on the holy ground of Jesus suffering, to be nourished by the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, and to bring all your deepest dread and suffering to God in prayer. In doing this, you can be certain that you will find the tomb empty and the proclamation of Resurrection on your lips and in your life.

Over time we have continued the practice of washing one another's feet during this liturgy. In so doing we continue an ancient practice. I have been thinking a lot about this practice, since it is rooted in humble hospitality. I wonder if today 2 our practice might more effectively mirror the intent of Jesus if we simply helped one another to wash our hands. Everywhere we go there are hand cleansing stations.

It is a modern sign of preparation to do important things such as greet one another, serve each other food or minister in some personal way. We also wash up after the hard work of service in our gardens, or participation in Rebuilding Together.

On a trip to Kenya 20 years ago I was celebrating the Holy Eucharist with the Bishop of the Diocese, as we moved into the Great Thanksgiving large bowls of water, soap and towels appeared and everyone began washing their hands. These bowls were well used, not fancy, and I realized that my brothers and sisters had made long journeys, handling animals, and so on and that as a way of entering into the sacred mystery of the Eucharist and anticipating receiving the bread and the wine, everyone was washing their hands. This was not a ritual as such, but an action that connected a practical reality to the spiritual action.

It was a form of hospitality, of care for one another and a recognition that what was about to occur called forth our best. Tonight we wash one another's hands in a deep spirit of love preparing one another to enter into the service of God who came among us as a servant, and to love and serve one another as Christ loves and serves us.