

Maundy Thursday
St. John 13:1-35

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Every Wednesday this Lent, we have been reciting Psalm 51—the “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” Psalm. Every week, you have been saying verse 16, “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.” (Psalm 51:16 KJV) That, coupled with the Gospel lesson appointed for Maundy Thursday presents a particular problem for many in this world, you included, I would say.

John 13 tells you exactly the kind of god YHWH is, which is counter to every other kind of god you may know about, as well as those you do not. Every false religion is set up by the father of lies, that Old Serpent who crept into the Garden of Eden and tricked Adam and the woman. As it stands, Satan seeks glory for himself, seeks worship in the way the world understands worship; he seeks honor and reverence from the world. Consequently, this is exactly what those false gods of the false religions demand of their adherents. From sacrifice and burnt offering to shouts of praise that tell the false god just how good he or she is and how deserving of your respect and homage they are.

Not so with YHWH. “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.” He alone is worthy everything that Satan sets up these false gods to receive, that he himself thinks he is worthy of. “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.” (Psalm 40:6) “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:6)

Then, there’s what Jesus does in today’s text:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

The Son of God, Jesus the Christ, anointed to bear the sin of the world and be the world’s Savior, girds Himself as a servant, stoops down like a servant, and washes feet as a servant would do for his master’s guests. “[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

By now, you may be thinking about the temple sacrifices, the sacrificial and burnt offering system that YHWH Himself set up in Egypt and the Exodus wilderness and wondering, “Did God not require and desire these sacrifices?” Truly, He did, but they all demonstrated His grace and mercy for His people. His care for His people was so great that He would not demand the justice that He required of them—their own deaths for their sins—so He gives them a substitute. “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” (Genesis 22:8) These sacrifices and burnt offerings give their lives in place of another, a vicarious atonement, demonstrating the mercy and forbearance of God. They come from God, as He provides them for His people.

And they all point forward to the very Lamb of God, the Paschal victim, who came to give His life as a ransom for many, **the** vicarious atonement. He took on flesh and blood so that He could do for His creation what they could not do for themselves—what you could not do for yourself: atone for your own sins. His blood was spilled and His life given in atonement, as your once-for-all Sacrifice. God

provided His Son as the Lamb for the burnt offering under the fire of His own wrath. Christ Jesus, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. He has given His life as a ransom for many—for you. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus girded Himself as the servant that He was and washed His disciples feet. “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me. He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; you are all clean...” “[Y]ou were washed...you were sanctified...you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11) You are clean because of the word Jesus has spoken to you. (cf. John 15:3) Jesus, demonstrating His servant-hood, becomes the servant of His disciples, and washes their feet.

You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them...A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

This is the trouble that the world and often you have with this text, especially in light of Psalm 51. Is not God worthy of something from us? Should we not praise Him with words that tell Him that He is fantastic and show Him that we are dedicated to Him? Shouldn’t we offer something to Him, sacrifice something to Him? Yes, He is certainly worthy of these things, but He does not require or desire them. And this because you, struggling with sin as you do on this side of eternity, are not at all capable of properly showing Him that worth or praise or dedication. Your heart is too apt to stray, and then, in those times, you would rather do anything but show God how worthy He is of anything, anything but praise Him, and anything but show your dedication to Him—quite the contrary, you demonstrate that you are not dedicated to Him.

Even in this, however, God is faithful and gracious. He gives you the words with which to praise Him, because you cannot bring them yourselves—prayer and praise are rightly called speaking God’s words back to Him. So, from the Scriptures, you are given words with which to pray to your Father in heaven and give Him praise. He gives you the faith to believe and trust in Him, to seek from Him all that He would give you to support this body and life and into the next, because God is dedicated to you! He does not require these things from you without first giving them to you!

There are others who get this wrong in holding foot washing rites around this time of year. Now, I’m not saying that girding yourself as a servant and washing your brother’s feet is necessarily a bad thing. Only a fool would call something Jesus did a bad thing. However, while Jesus implores His disciples to wash each other’s feet, He calls it an example of what He has done to them, then gives them the command to love one another. If the disciples had taken Jesus as literally as some would like to, then foot washing rites would have been a regular part of the church’s liturgy—as the Lord’s Supper is—and frankly, I wouldn’t be a pastor. (It’s not that I mind serving you and loving you, but washing another’s feet is not my thing.) Jesus washes feet and implores the same as an example of His love for them and you, that you would in turn love one another, and this certainly not to be done as an homage to Him.

Jesus commands His disciples to love one another. Whether you like the person who has a place in Christ’s Church with you or not, He commands you to love them, and you show that love for

them as you serve them where they have a need. These good works have no bearing on your salvation; they are given to you for you to serve your neighbor. "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13) "Bear one another's burdens," St. Paul wrote, "and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2) Which is that law of Christ? "A new commandment I give to you," Jesus Christ said, "that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

How did Jesus love you? By serving you. His service to you is ultimately found in His death on the cross. There, He exchanged His life for yours. There, He showed His dedication to you, that He would not see the sinner die (cf. Ezekiel 33:11), so He dies in the place of the sinner—in the place of every one of them. He dies in your place. He gives His body and sheds His blood as your ransom, that you may have life, and have it to the fullest. (cf. John 10:10)

That's why, on this night when He was betrayed, Jesus took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The same body given on the cross Jesus gives you as bread to eat. The same blood shed on the cross Jesus gives you as wine to drink. These are His body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins. They are signs and a memorial to you of YHWH's dedication to you, that you have been freed from His wrath by the death of His Son, a death that you proclaim again and again in your eating of the bread which is His body and the drinking of the wine which is His blood; signs and a memorial, but so much more! They are to you forgiveness, life, and salvation!

This is the love Jesus points to when He commanded His disciples to love one another, exemplified in His washing of the disciples feet: that He would take on your flesh and blood and die for you, and give you that body and blood as true food for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. The sacrifices are over. It is finished! (John 19:30) YHWH does not desire or require anything of you, because He has done it all for you and to you in Christ. "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) In His body give and blood shed—by way of His death in your place, once-for-all—you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.