

“He invites the disciples to his meal.  
Wraps the towel around his waist. Sets the basin at their feet. And himself beside.  
‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ Peter asks.  
‘What I do now you do not understand.’  
‘Lord, you will never wash my feet.’  
‘If I do not wash your feet, you have no part in me.’  
Peter accedes, then overtries, on his steps to faith.  
The Life puts in Peter’s foot. Lifts another dripping foot out.  
Someone thinks of the baptisms they performed all across Israel.  
Unclear if Peter thinks of the hand that pulled him from the churning waters.  
The Life dries him with the clean linen that covers him. Pink and olive skin blossoms  
from the towel. Sets the bright flesh on the cool terra cotta.  
So he does with all his disciples. Seats them at his table.  
‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.’  
So welcomes the Lamb.”

- Christ the Life, Martin, Thomas L. *The Servant*

The words of this Maundy Thursday reflection from the book, Christ the Life, by Thomas L. Martin express with eloquence and simplicity the invitation before us this night. We, like the twelve, have come. To commune with our Lord on this Passover night; To sup at the Lord’s table; To be in His presence, to listen and hear what he has to say, to receive his blessing.

On this last night before his Hour, Jesus is acutely present to all that is about to transpire. Betrayal and denial, suffering, and death await him. But His hour has not yet come. Full of love for them, and perhaps wanting to prepare them for the journey ahead, Jesus does something surprising, unexpected. Without a word, he removes his robe, ties a towel around his waist, fills a basin with water, and like a servant, begins to wash and wipe their feet.

They are uncertain of how to respond, of what to do. They wonder: how can they allow him to touch their feet? He is not their slave, he is their teacher, their Lord. If anything, it is they who should be washing his feet. Expressing the discomfort in the room, the discomfort he, and they, and perhaps we, all feel, Peter refuses. Jesus insists. And Peter, sensing something beyond what he sees or can know, chooses to receive Jesus’ act of hospitality, inclusion, and welcome.

“I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.”

The evening continues as Jesus re-gathers them at the table, blesses the bread and wine, and soaks in each beloved face as he invites them to eat, to drink, and to remember. We don't know if the disciples got the significance of the moment. As they shared the bread and passed the cup, did Jesus' words calling for remembrance make any sense? Might they, one day, look back on this night and recognize the radical inclusivity of Jesus' love? How Jesus' forgiveness and gift of grace welcomed to the table not only his friends, but also his betrayer and his denier.

With his words, and by his actions, Jesus makes clear what we, who love and follow him, must do. We must love, not just Jesus, but everyone. Not with exclusion, but with inclusion and welcome. We must serve, not for gain or reward, but selflessly and generously, and with humility. This is how the world will know that we are Christ's, by our love and our service.

And so, we must work to break down the barriers that would keep us safe and at a distance. Love can make us feel exposed, vulnerable. Loving can feel risky, unsafe, and we may get up caught in our fears and doubts.

We may wonder if we are worthy, if we deserve such grace and consideration from others, let alone God.

On his last night before his death, Jesus taught us and showed us that we can trust love. We deserve love. And we are called to share, with sincere hearts, God's love. For where charity and love are – God is there.

As we lean into the sacred rituals of this Maundy Thursday: foot washing, Holy Eucharist and the stripping of the altar, let us watch, witness, partake and draw near to Jesus –the one who loves and forgives, who teaches and serves, who heals and saves, who breaks in and breaks through, often catching us, like Peter, by surprise.

What might we hear? What might we see? How might our lives be transformed by Jesus' radical and inclusive love?