

Maundy Thursday A (4/13/2017)

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Whenever hurt or uncertainty enters into our lived experience, we are quick to wash our hands of each other. We have nothing to do with those whom we resent or antagonize or fear, precluding relationships that might otherwise nurture our common life. We even wash our hands of Jesus, nevertheless he washes our feet, setting before us a divine model of humility and sacrificial love.

Jesus might as well wash his hands of us. “The Word became flesh and lived among us,”¹ the Gospel of John confesses at Christmas, yet what does the beloved Son of God experience of this life? **The world does not know him, neither the powerful who plot his demise, nor the crowds who cry out for his crucifixion, nor even his own friends who forsake him in the end.** Jesus is “full of grace and truth,”² but the world to which he comes is full of judgment and fear, greed and self-preservation, deceit and violence. “The world hates me,” he acknowledges, “because I testify against it that its works are evil.”³

Jesus might as well wash his hands of us. After all, it’s standard practice. Have you been wronged, embittered by someone else’s carelessness or hostility? Do you begrudge your rivals, those whose interests you assume are opposed to yours? Are you wary of others, suspicious of those whose identity or worldview differs from your own? **Whenever hurt or uncertainty enters into our lived experience, we are quick to wash our hands of each other.** We have nothing to do with those

¹ John 1:14.

² Ibid.

³ John 7:7.

whom we resent or antagonize or fear, precluding relationships that might otherwise nurture our common life.

Jesus might as well wash his hands of us, but instead, he washes our feet. Kneeling before his disciples at the Last Supper, he performs the work of a servant, rinsing away the debris from their life's journey with a gentle touch. Kneeling before his disciples at the Last Supper, he accomplishes the work of God, setting before us a divine model of humility and sacrificial love.

In the Passion story according to Matthew, Pontius Pilate, the mouthpiece for the Roman occupation, senses that a riot is beginning in Jerusalem. So, he literally washes his hands of Jesus, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves." Of course, no one is innocent except Jesus himself. Yet, even as we wash our hands of him, the Lord offers us his very life, fulfilling the promise he made at the meal the night before: "This is my body that is for you. ...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The basin and towel are here, dear church, the bread and wine. **Come, wash and be washed. Come, eat and drink. Remember his loving deed – his life given and poured out – and pattern your lives on the Lord Jesus Christ until he comes again.**