**John 13:1-5,12-17** February 14, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-week Lent #1

Dear fellow travelers on our annual trek to Calvary!

I don’t know how many times you have made this Lenten pilgrimage. Some of you are maybe new to this. Others have grown familiar with the route from the upper room to Calvary; you have been traveling it a decade or more. One or two of you out there have made this journey for over half a century!

It is my prayer that, however many times you have traveled from the upper room to Calvary, that this and the next five Wednesdays, may be a journey meaningful to you pilgrims. May God bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of your hearts.

So what are we going to study this year in our Lenten services? Let me quiz you. Think about the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. How much time do they cover? Yep, about 33 years; Jesus life from birth to ascension. But you also know that the Gospels center most of their attention on the three years of Jesus’ ministry. But on this question, the Gospel of John is kind of special. Almost one quarter of the entire Gospel of John covers a single meal. One meal, five chapters! The meal is the Passover that Jesus celebrated in the upper room. Chapters 13 to 17 of John cover that meal. It was Jesus’ last chance to teach his disciples, and he knew it. This year in Lent, we consider the things Jesus taught in that upper room. The theme for our Lenten messages is this: What He Wanted them to Remember. Remember, it’s his last meal with them. What He Wanted them to Remember.

This evening we look at the first lesson of Jesus’ last lessons to the disciples. We read from John chapter 13:1-5,12-17:

*John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*

*2The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*12When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*

The disciples had their virtues, they also had their weaknesses, but they had one glaring fault that popped up again and again. They were greedy for status. Many times the Gospels tell us that the disciples argued about who of them was the greatest. Now that sounds strange among Jesus’ followers. You kind of expect that in the workplace, right? People angling for the promotion, for the pay raise, tearing down others behind their backs. It also happened in that small band of faithful followers of Jesus.

It might seem remarkable that Jesus, who was such a humble man, a servant of the people, had such selfish disciples. We have seen it: Great parents, trouble-maker children. Happened to Jesus, too. So Jesus is going to do something about it. In his last meal, before anything else, he teaches them something he wanted them to remember: **Live Like Forgiven People.** Live in humility. Without humility, you cannot do anything pleasing to God. Without humility, every action is a Pharisee in a temple shouting, “God, I thank you that I am so much better than everyone else.”

Jesus had tried to teach humility to his disciples. He taught at least two parables on the subject (Lk 14:7ff; 17:7ff). He lived a life of service to other people. For example, that time we just talked about in Sunday Bible Class, that time when Jesus’ relative and loyal colleague John the Baptist was executed, and his severed head paraded around Herod’s palace, Jesus wanted just to go off and grieve. But the crowds mercilessly hounded him. Yet he didn’t tell them to get lost. He had pity on them. He served them.

His disciples had learned precious little from Jesus’ life of service. In fact, the gospel of Luke tells us even that at this final meal of Jesus’ life, even at this sacred Passover meal, these clowns were still arguing about which of them was the greatest! (Luke 22:24) I mean really! Their heads are full of concrete. What to do? If Jesus ever did anything desperate, it was here.

Now, if you ever watch the movie, *The Gospel of John*, John 13:4 is one place that makes me think, “You didn’t have to show that!” But maybe the movie did have to show it. Jesus had to do it. I don’t know how to say this delicately, but Jesus basically strips down to his underclothes. If we think only of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, we miss the shock of what he does. It isn’t’ just the act. The revered rabbi crouches at the feet of the glory-seeking disciples, performing an act specifically reserved for the lowest ranking servant in a Jewish house. Jesus takes on the appearance, not of a servant, but a slave. That is what this Gospel says when it describes, ***“so he took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”*** Jesus shames them, and they felt it. By his actions, Jesus is rebuking the sin of their foolish, stupid pride.

Their pride has forced Jesus to humiliate himself. You say, “No, you can’t force Jesus to humiliate himself.” Yes, we did! Every one of us forced Jesus into a greater humiliation than this! Because of our sin, Jesus left heaven, became flesh and blood, died on a cross.

That is why we have a confessional service like this one on the first day of Lent. We caused Jesus to humiliate himself, to humble himself to death, yes, death on a cross. The reason was so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God. For that, we thank God! Let us live like forgiven people.

Jesus did more than confront their sin. Jesus did dressed up like a slave to teach them and us what our lives should look like.

So much of what Jesus did in life, I cannot do. I do not have miraculous powers to heal the sick I visit. I do not have the ability to take away a single of my own sins, much less someone else’s sin. There is so much that Jesus did that I cannot. But when Jesus said, ***“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”*** he did give us something we can do. We can serve the needs of others. We can wash feet, fix up houses, provide a ride, share a meal, listen to the hurts and worries of others.

Jesus could willingly suffer humiliation because he knew who he was and where he was going. The Gospel introduces this event with these words, ***“Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father… Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal…”*** In short, Jesus’ knowledge of who he was and where he was going led him to humble service to his disciples.

Like Jesus but in a different way, on Ash Wednesday, we are reminded who we are (forgiven sinners). We are reminded where we are going (heaven). And because we know who we are and where we are going in Christ Jesus, we can confidently serve others. As Christians we shouldn’t worry how much helping others will cost us, because God promises to provide for us, his children. We shouldn’t worry about whether doing God’s will will make us miss out on something in this world, because we have eternal life in a future world.

We can serve in the fun, easy ways that God has gifted us to serve. Enjoy serving God in those times when you can use your abilities and what you enjoy doing to his glory.

But also know that we cannot always serve in the easy and fun ways. Service that God desires will sometimes, but not always, be a “follow your dreams” kind of service; or an “I just love to do this” sort of service. True service in Christ’s name will often ask us to give up something. When Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, in a sense he lost something, at least in human eyes. He gave up some of his, his respectability when he dressed as a slave rather than a Jewish rabbi.

But we can truly follow Jesus’ example because we know that, like that tax collector in our Gospel reading, this evening we go home justified before God through faith in Jesus.

Verse 17: ***“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*** Amen.