

Blogging toward Maundy Thursday: Be reconciled, then eat

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*For more commentary on the readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes the current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

"Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world." What happens when you know your time has come? What do you say to those closest to you?

John 13 records the beginning of Jesus' last words and instructions to his disciples. But first, he washes their feet.

How it must have been to have the rabbi, teacher, healer, and Lord do this! He goes to each disciple, one by one. With his own hands, he removes the dirt and grime of the journey. The entire action could symbolize how in his death and resurrection, he would wipe away sin.

But there's more: he also instructs the disciples to wash one another's feet, to "do as I have done to you." It's a glimpse into Jesus' work preparing them for continued mission and ministry. Foot washing—washing and being washed—is an act of service and humility, but also a sign of Jesus' love for them and theirs for one another. Both the giving and the receiving of love are part of the new commandment he gives.

The cornerstone of this text is love, *agape* love. The love the disciples experience in the foot washing will carry them as they live out Jesus' commandment and commission. This tangible love is what he gives us to continue as his disciples today.

I attended my first foot-washing service while in seminary. The vulnerability and the love it took to serve and be served—to wash and be washed, to care and be cared for—ushered in Christ's presence and his will and way like I had not experienced before. To love and be loved was a transforming experience that has shaped my understanding of ministry and the mission of Jesus.

I am now a pastor in the Brethren tradition, in which this passage from John is the basis for the Love Feast. This practice takes place once or twice a year, especially on Maundy Thursday. It includes prayer and examination, foot washing, the feast itself, and then bread-and-cup communion.

During the Love Feast, members are asked to reflect on four questions. [From the Church of the Brethren website](#) [pdf]:

1. How have you been growing into your baptism?
2. In what ways are you still in a covenant of love and peace with your fellow followers of Jesus?
3. Are there significant roadblocks to your journey towards wholeness and holiness?
4. How might this community help you on the journey?

“After reconciling any discord among ourselves,” [the site says](#), “we lovingly wash each other’s feet, then enjoy a meal together.”

So significant is the Love Feast in Brethren communities that in years past, deacons would go two-by-two on annual visits to members’ homes to inquire if they were living at peace with God and one another. If so, they could attend the Love Feast. (This annual visit has been replaced by the time of prayer and examination before the foot washing.) Imagine if we each examined our lives and relationships and made space to reconcile and be at peace before we continued forth in Holy Week. What would the church be like? What would our communities and families be like?

On Maundy Thursday, pause and take an inventory. Take some time to reflect and identify places where reconciliation is needed. Let this be a focus of our individual and collective prayers. Make moves to reach out and restore relationships. Make room for reconciliation and healing to happen. And at worship, let the service of foot washing and communion be an agent of renewal as we follow Christ and serve together in these times.