

April 9, Maundy Thursday (Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; John 13:1-17, 31b-35)

Jesus is saying, *Love should feel like this.*

by [Brian Bantum](#) in the [April 8, 2020](#) issue

The disciples do not know why, but the air in the house is thick. The days have swung from the miraculous to the confrontational, and every night it takes a few deep breaths just to process the day.

Still, tonight feels a bit different. Jesus seems even more deliberate in his words to them. He seems intent. He is seeing them but also seeing what lies beyond the bend. It feels like present and future are colliding in this space, but it's difficult to figure out which is which.

Jesus speaks of bread and wine, and the disciples eat and drink. He speaks of covenant and brokenness and blood. The disciples eat and eat, drink and drink, listening as best they can to what he is saying and what he is not saying.

Then he kneels down before them, before each one, and washes their feet, between their toes and up to their ankles, drying each foot with his own robe before sliding over to the next.

Judas has gone. The others are wondering what Jesus' words meant, what Judas intends to do. Maybe there's a bustle of dishes getting cleared. But they all feel the question expanding in the room: "What's next? What did these three years mean?"

The room feels like it has filled with water and they are not so much sitting as they are floating, not so much talking as they are absorbing the reverberations of sound echo, only making out every other word. They are on the verge of something. Houses on the eve of death sometimes feel like this. Time itself begins to bend; minutes both freeze and fly by. Mothers and brothers frenetically wash dishes or sweep floors. Others cling to the death-bound, trying to keep them from slipping into another world—or at least to keep them company on the way.

Of course, the disciples don't know Jesus is going to die. Or at least they don't really believe what he's told them so many times by now. But the house feels different that night.

Then Jesus pricks the balloon. The present comes rushing in and the water recedes and they hear Jesus' voice clearly now, so clearly it is pressing in on them. "You cannot go where I am going," he says.

Though as usual, these words don't seem to quite touch the ground. Does he mean "you can't go into the seat of imperial power and snark the governor with me"? Or does he mean, "you can't go to where the dead have gone and stitch life back into death"? Perhaps he means, "you cannot be the charismatic force of nature pulling tens of thousands from place to place through your own force of nature or clever words." Or maybe all of the above?

But they can love one another, he says. It's not fantastic. It's not glamorous or revolutionary. Jesus asks them to love one another, and not just in words of affirmation or random acts of kindness. His disciples are lying and sitting around him after dinner with full bellies and clean feet. Love one another, he tells them.

Perhaps Jesus is saying to them, *Feel the stretch of your bellies? That lack of hunger, the taste of bread and figs that still coats your tongue? Love like that. Love in such a way that people feel the hunger ebb from them, even for just a moment.*

Do you feel the cool of the air, your feet clean of that film of dust that had come to feel like a second skin after a day's walking? Love should feel like this.

Maundy Thursday, filled with anticipation and uncertainty, gives us a new commandment. Inside the thrill of triumphal entries and crowds pressing in, this man the disciples love has said everything they wish they could have said to the money changers and the powers that be. But now they feel a turn, murmurings and furtive glances. Jesus himself seems to take more time than usual. The week slows to a crawl.

Tucked inside this muddle is a command to be with one another, to make sure everyone has had enough, to make sure their feet have been freed from the burdens of the day so they can sleep well and walk new into the next day.

People will see this, Jesus seems to say to them. When they do, invite the stranger into this love. Feed them. Wash their feet. Perhaps even more, he is telling them, *You don't have to be like me in the ways you think you do. Break bread. Take. Eat. Do this in remembrance of me.*

"I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications," writes the psalmist. "Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live." Jesus has inclined more than his ear to us. He has bent down, inclined the fullness of himself into our lives. On the eve of his death perhaps we can feel the weight of this, the heaviness of our homes and our world. But perhaps we might also sit back, in our confusion about where it is we cannot go, and lift our eyes to where Jesus has asked us to be, right now, and with whom.