**Maundy Thursday, April 17, 2014; Exodus 12:1-14;Ps 116; 1 Cor 11:23-26; John 13:1-17,31-35; Rev Mary Trainor**

Jesus said, (in the 12th chapter of John, v. 26***)"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."***Tonight is the night of the church year when we ponder servanthood: Jesus as servant, and we as servants. Serve, servant, service. These words move us to thinking about a whole range of things, some good and some not so good depending upon the perspective. In terms of the good, we think about helping, making life easier. When we take our car in for service, it gets attention where it needs it, it gets tuned up and performance improves. When we serve each other, it makes us feel good, gives us a fresh start, makes things better. In terms of the **not** so good aspects of servanthood, we think people who are lower in status waiting on ungrateful people who have more money and power. We think about servants being downtrodden, we think about hard work for very low pay and about mistreatment. Yet tonight, the Thursday in Holy Week, we are to ponder being servants as Jesus is a servant. We certainly don't aspire to be servants!

In fact, we aren't much different than Peter was when he said, "***You will never wash my feet."*** Peter said this because he did not want to have Jesus be doing a task that was beneath His stature, His status. Yet Jesus answered, "***Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."*** Oh my, ok, Jesus told him, and then showed him! It is the evening before the crucifixion, at the Last Supper. Jesus, "***He got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel.***" This would be like some well respected famous person, like Governor Scott Walker or Vice President Joe Biden or singer Jennifer Lopez, coming to your house for dinner and waiting on you -- serving you dinner, washing the dishes, mopping up under the floor, dealing with your garbage. This would be outrageous -- you would not only not expect it, but you would not permit it! It is not appropriate for the great prophet, the Messiah to wash my dirty feet - right? Wrong, according to Jesus. Jesus didn't just say the words, He showed it in his humble actions. He is teaching us about how we are to be with each other - and it is a radical lesson, contrary to what we expect. Jesus said, "***servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.....I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another***." This is called Maundy Thursday because Maundy means command. The word "mandate" comes from the same root. So, this is the day when Jesus gave us this commandment to love one another. That water Jesus used to wash the apostles' feet symbolizes the cleansing water of forgiveness, our new start, new beginning.

So, how are we to show love for one another, in this culture? A song from 1977 written by Richard Gillard, tells us how. You have the words as an insert in your bulletin. Say them along with me, as you ponder Christian servanthood**: Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too. We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load. I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear; I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear. I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I’ll laugh with you; I will share your joy and sorrow till we’ve seen this journey through. When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony, born of all we’ve known together of Christ’s love and agony. Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too."**

So, being servants to each other means coming alongside each other in the Name of Christ, with Christ right there for us. We are companions on the road, helping each other even to deal with fear and find our way. Maybe it is a calming voice on the phone in the midst of a difficult day. Maybe it is having patience with someone who is annoying. If we are with each other through the pain as well as the joy, cry with each other, laugh with each other....till we’ve seen this journey through. This does not sound too difficult, but oh my -- it is. People who get sick, who end up homebound or in the hospital, express how they lose their friends; people don't visit with them anymore, now that they can't get around as well. We aren't very good at these things because they are uncomfortable....but we are called to do them anyway, and God will give us the strength and words. Theologian Richard Foster said, “**Service that is duty-motivated breaths death. Service that flows out of our inward person is life, and joy and peace. The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of the towel...Begin the day by praying, “Lord Jesus, I would so appreciate it if You would bring me someone today whom I can serve.” The Holy Spirit will lead us and equip us to do so, even when we can't do this from our own power.** We can get outside of our comfort zones and pick up the phone, go see people, reach out and care -- if we allow the servant of Christ to fill us, inspire us. Christian servanthood is a loving choice we make to minister to others.

On this special night in the church, immediately following Holy Communion, all consecrated bread and wine will be consumed and there will be no Holy Communion until Easter Sunday. The only remaining presence of Christ, in one piece of consecrated bread, will be carried from the church to the chapel altar. There you are invited to pray as Jesus begged His disciples to do: “***Stay awake with me, watch and pray***.” Then the main altar will be stripped -- all symbols and reminders of Christ’s presence in His church here – will be removed. This culminates in the washing of the altar, in which every memory of Jesus’ presence is symbolically washed away, and we begin three dark days of remembering the Jesus' death, contemplating what our lives would be like without a risen Jesus. Our darkness will be broken Sunday morning by the glorious light of his resurrection. Let us then prepare with joy to eat this bread and drink his cup, which we will not enjoy again until his resurrection. Amen.