

Maundy Thursday

With Grace United Methodist Church

Introduction

This holy day, celebrated on the Thursday before Easter, takes its name from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means “commandment.” On this day, we commemorate the moment when Jesus tells his disciples, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34). This new commandment is given physical expression as Jesus washes the disciples’ feet – an incredible act of humility and love that requires considerable vulnerability (John 13:1-19). Many churches opt to observe this day with the practice of ritual hand washing, rather than feet. While foot washing is more unsettling and therefore a surprisingly powerful expression of humility and servitude, washing one another’s hands can serve this same purpose if done with care and intentionality.

The **foot or hand washing** liturgy below is offered as a guide for observing this ritual in the safety of your own home. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic prevents us from participating in this ritual together, as a congregation, where we would be reminded that to be disciples of Jesus is to serve and love one another without partiality. While we pray to be reminded of this calling as we look forward to returning to our life together as members of Grace UMC, we can embrace this present opportunity to consider how Christ’s *mandatum* also applies to our Christian life at home. Whether we live with a large family or on our own, we can pray together in the Spirit, read the scriptures, and reflect on how we can serve one another as beloved children of God, each of us worthy of great care and love.

We encourage you to conclude this ritual of hand washing with another beloved Methodist tradition: the **Love Feast** or Agape Meal. This meal recalls those that Jesus shared with his disciples during his ministry but it is not the same as the Lord’s Supper or Communion. While Communion is a sacrament, the Love Feast has “appeared only at certain times and among certain denominations.” The Love Feast is often held on occasions when the celebration of the Lord’s Supper would be inappropriate, such as when there are no clergy present to authorize or administer the Sacrament. The Love Feast is most naturally held around a table and is a wonderful ritual to orchestrate at home with family and friends, whether in person or digitally over Zoom or FaceTime.

We invite you to use the liturgy below in preparation for sharing a dinner meal together. Love Feasts have traditionally involved testimonies, hymns, prayer, and scripture, so each of those elements is included here. Sharing over a dinner meal distinguishes this ritual from Communion, but also emphasizes the communal celebration of the Love Feast. After washing your hands and using the Love Feast liturgy, enjoy your dinner together but strive to keep the conversation focused on your faith: share where you see God moving in your life or what you are praying for during this season. Most of all, enjoy each other’s company in Christian fellowship, giving thanks for the opportunity that we often take for granted, that is, to share a meal with those close to you.

(Adapted from *UM Discipleship Ministries*)

Foot or Hand Washing Liturgy

While this service assumes a small gathering, it can be performed by an individual. Even on our own, we can commune with God, in Christ, and through the Spirit, remembering that we are made one with others, past and present, in the Body of Christ.

Prepare a basin with water at a comfortable temperature and have one or two dry towels ready. After everything has been prepared, begin with prayer...

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we have gathered together in your name to remember the events of the first Maundy Thursday. Draw us closer to you, we pray, that your love might inspire us again. Fill us with your Spirit, that we might serve you today, tomorrow, and every day of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading Scripture Together

John 13:1-20, 31-35

Reflection

What do you think makes a person truly great? Is it their amazing talent or good looks? Their status, wealth, or possessions?

In our reading for today, the world's values are turned upside down as Jesus shows us what true greatness is all about. He does this through the symbolic action of washing the dirty, smelly feet of his disciples and then commanding them to model this kind of servant-minded love for one another.

Foot washing was normally the job of a servant, as it was the lowest job of all. Jesus could have commanded his disciples to wash *his* feet; after all, he's the Messiah! Instead, Jesus humbled himself and served *them*, doing the job that no-one else was willing to do. This is a glorious picture of our God: the one who has all power and authority, who has created the heavens and the earth, and yet who is willing to lay aside his glory, putting on human nature in order to wash our feet. What humility, what love, what true greatness! Thanks be to God!

(Adapted from *All Age Worship Resources*)

Introductory Prayer

Creator God, we give you praise and thanks. For you brought creation to birth, made us in your image, saw the goodness of your creation, and called us blessed. We see you revealed in Jesus. Who laid aside power to proclaim the coming of your kingdom, by riding a donkey along a dusty road to the praises of a crowd, shouting: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest.

We come together here in the name of Jesus who in the night that he was betrayed took water and a towel knelt at the feet of his friends and washed their feet asking that his friends remember him and live by his example. Spirit of God, be with us as we wash each other's hands in a gesture of loving remembrance. Help us to bring in your kingdom by acts of love. In the name of

one who lived and laughed and loved and wept and died and rose again that we might know the way of living in your love.

Amen

Foot or Hand Washing

Proceed to gently wash and then dry each other's feet or hands. This ritual can be done in silence, or with a simple phrase that affirms our shared identity: "Remember your baptism, and be thankful," or "Remember that you are a beloved child of God." Normally, our hand washing at Grace UMC would be followed by Communion. While it is not proper to celebrate Communion without the church body present, we encourage you to follow this hand-washing ritual with a supper of your own, reflecting on the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples and the heavenly banquet that he prepares for us. We're invited to use the following historical liturgy with your meal.

Love Feast Liturgy

Now that your hands are washed, join together in this traditional Love Feast liturgy! Again, this liturgy assumes a small gathering, but the feast can certainly be enjoyed by those living alone. Any individual can sing, pray, read scripture, and give thanks to God!

Begin with a hymn, but do not feel pressured to sing; speaking these words together is a prayer offered to God. After the reading of scripture and reflection, the meal will be passed from person to person. Before eating, however, an offering should be received. If you have children, be intentional about having them bring some coins to the table to give as an offering before they partake in the meal. Enjoy your meal together and conclude with another sung or spoken hymn and prayer.

Enjoy this traditional celebration of Christian fellowship in the Body of Christ!

Opening Hymn: *What Feast of Love* (Text: Delores Dufner, OSB Tune: Greensleeves)

What feast of love is offered here; what banquet come from heaven?

What food of everlasting life, what gracious gift is given?

This, this is Christ the King, the bread come down from heaven,

O taste and see and sing! How sweet the manna given!

What light of truth is offered here, what covenant from heaven?

What hope of everlasting life, what wondrous word is given?

This, This is Christ the King, the sun come down from heaven.

O see and hear and sing! The Word of God is given!

What wine of love is offered here, what crimson drink from heaven?

What hope of everlasting life, what wondrous word is given?

This, this is Christ the king, the sweetest wine of heaven.

O taste and see and sing! The Son of God is given!

Opening Prayer**

We thank you, O God, for the life and knowledge which you have revealed through Jesus, your child and our brother. To you be glory forever.

As the piece of bread was scattered over the hills and then brought together and made one, so, let your church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

For yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever. AMEN.

Scripture Readings

Galatians 3: 26-29

...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Ephesians 4: 1-6

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Testimonies

With the scripture readings complete, spend some time meditating on these passages. Share your thoughts, ask questions, and discern where these passages are challenging you and/or providing needed encouragement today.

Passing of the Meal

Pass the bread or aspects of the meal from person to person. Each person may be invited in passing the bread to quote a scripture verse. The leader may receive last and close with a few words, a short prayer, or an invitation to new commitment to Christ and a holy life.

Collection or Offering

At this time, pass a bowl or cup to collect an offering that will be given to those in need around your community.

The Agape Feast

Here before us, we find food and drink. We are reminded that this is not a Eucharistic feast, but one of love and fellowship celebrated between Christian brothers and sisters. Let us commemorate our unity through Christ, and feast on the spirit of love who is Christ.

Enjoy your meal!

Closing Song: *I Need You To Survive*

I need you, you need me, we're all a part of God's body.
Stand with me, agree with me, we're all a part of God's body.
It is God's will that every need be supplied;
You are important to me, I need you to survive,
You are important to me, I need you to survive.

I pray for you, you pray for me, I love you,
I need you to survive.
I won't harm you with words from my mouth,
I love you,
I need you to survive. (repeat)
It is God's will that every need be supplied;
You are important to me, I need you to survive,
You are important to me, I need you to survive.

Amen

*This service is designed by Dr. Cynthia A. Wilson (2018)

**Opening Prayer taken from the Didache