

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Almighty, who for our sakes humbled Yourself and took upon Yourself the form of a servant, we humbly ask You, govern us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not be offended at Your lowliness, but heartily believe that by Your obedience even unto the death of the cross You have redeemed us from the wrath of God and from eternal death, and keep us steadfast in such faith and in Christian humility, that we also may finally be exalted with You and made partakers of Your glory, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (The Lutheran Liturgy, companion altar book for The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 94)

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For He knew who was to betray Him; that was why He said, "Not all of you are clean." When He had washed their feet and put on His outer garments and resumed His place, He said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

In Christ Jesus, the Servant of all servants who girded Himself, bending low in His eternal service to us, dear fellow redeemed:

Our Epistle lesson from Palm Sunday prepared us well for what we have come to mind on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday: "Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Our God and Creator, in the person of the Son, condescended to our earth and took on human flesh, so that He might serve us His beloved, albeit, rebellious creatures. As the writer of Hebrews pointed out based on Psalm 8, our Lord God did this so that He might taste death for us all. This episode of Jesus washing the disciples feet in the upper room before His intense suffering began makes the point even for us today that **Lo(w), Jesus Loves Us and Is with Us to the Very End of the Age.**

I

All false gods expect their followers to ascend up to them and bargain for acceptance. The one and only true and Triune God alone has always condescended to His beloved creatures, the human race to give freely of His grace. This divine condescension goes contrary to our sinful reason as it did for Peter who questioned this foot washing activity for him by His Lord; just like he had after the great catch of fish when he said: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man O Lord.” John the Baptizer also questioned this condescension of the holy eternal God when he objected to baptizing Jesus, making the point that he should be the one baptized by Jesus.

This reveals the gracious heart of our Lord. Like the Father of the prodigal son, God runs to us, hugs and kisses us, interrupts our rehearsed speeches of repentance and gives us of His eternal blessings and prepares an everlasting feast for us. But it is not out of line for us to feel unworthy in this regard, because we are unworthy. It is proper in our repentance to be prepared and even rehearse with the prodigal in saying: “I am no longer worthy to be called your child.” But then believe His word of love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Lo, Jesus bends low in service to you, my fellow redeemed. What you recount in this Gospel lesson of washing the feet of the disciples and what you will once again recount tomorrow, the severe suffering and death, suffering even the eternal torments of your hell, show how low your dear Jesus was and is still willing to go for you, so that you might be exalted to the highest heaven.

II

That lowly service of love shown to us all did not end with the activities of that Thursday and Friday however. At first glance we may connect John’s observation at the beginning of our text: “when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” that He was referring to the end of His suffering. However before the evening is over, Jesus would pray His High

Priestly prayer and spoke of His own, not only who were living at the time but those who would believe the truth taught by the Apostles in generations to come – including you and me.

Jesus loves us to the end of the age, for as He promises elsewhere, “Lo, I am with you always to the very end of the age.” Exalted, Jesus still condescends to us with His love and all the blessings associated with that love. Right there on the altar, in a little while, what is now only bread and wine will also be our Lord’s true body and blood. We will be fulfilling His command – “Do this in remembrance of me ... for the forgiveness of sins.”

What do we do? Are we performing some great act of service in Holy Communion? No, we are just going to where Jesus says He will be found. We open our mouths to eat and to drink. We are at our Lord’s table not serving Him, but He is serving us. So the disciples, with clean feet, were again served by their Lord with that same holy body and blood given and shed for all their sins as well. The foot washing was in preparation for them to understand their role now as the receivers of God’s eternal grace.

In response to Peter’s objection Jesus said: “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” Did they understand after He served them the holy meal? Did they understand after He breathed His last on the cross? Did they believe after He rose again? - probably not until after the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But you, my post-Pentecostal believers do understand this now. God has condescended and continues to condescend to you with all His gifts for everlasting life. He bathed you and cleansed you making you fit guests at His table. So as you prepare to be served by our Lord at His festal table, pray with me:

Lord this is Your Feast,

Prepared by Your longing,

Spread at Your command,

Attended to at Your Invitation

Blessed by Your own Word

Distributed by Your servant’s hand,

The Undying memorial of Your
sacrifice upon the cross,

The full gift of Your
everlasting love,

And its perpetuation
till the end of time.

Lord, this is Bread of heaven, Bread of life, that, whoever eats of Your Holy Body, shall never hunger more.

And this, the Cup of pardon, healing, gladness, strength, that, whoever drinks of Your Holy Blood, thirsts not again.

So may we come, O Lord, to Your table.

Lord Jesus, blessed are You who come to us just as You desire and promise for our strengthening and delight.

Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. F. Colquhoun, p. 217, adapted)