

Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, the source of scrutiny and endless debate, is one of the most famous paintings in the world. I'm sure many of you can immediately picture it in your mind. Every one focuses on Jesus in the center, or Peter and John's dominant figures just to the right of him. But for once, place yourself not where Jesus is, or even Peter, but someone who's buried in a shadow, someone who looks withdrawn.

Where is Jesus going when he gets up from the meal? Do we need something more? Did we forget something? Did the owner of the upper room mess something up? Why is he taking off his outer garment? A towel? Oh... Eyes are wide open, jaws dropped, not a sound. Jesus starts his circle around the table as everyone is lying down. First Bartholomew, then James, then Andrew. Finally Jesus gets to *him*. Judas. The traitor. The greedy, deceptive, stab-you-in-the-back guy. Jesus looks him right in the eye. Jesus can read his mind. He knows his hands have touched those thirty silver coins. He knows his wandering eyes have been scoping out a place to hand him over. What to do? He could simply pass him over. He could blast Judas away with his divine justice right then and there to teach the disciples a lesson. But he has a far greater lesson in mind. Jesus looks at Judas, gently grasps his ankles, puts them in the basin, and washes his feet. Here on Maundy Thursday, **Jesus Does the Unthinkable. 1. He embodies his love to us. 2. He empowers us to imitate his love.**

The apostle John goes out of his way to emphasize Jesus could do anything he wanted with the divine power he had. Jesus is still fully God, even now! ***“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.”*** Jesus has everything in the palm of his hand. He could chastise all his disciples for their lackluster faith. He could defeat Satan right then and there with one show of glory. But the time has come for a specific action: he would leave this world in the greatest display of love ever. Many times before Jesus' time hadn't come. Now the hour for action has arrived. Salvation weighs in the balance.

In this hour when he has every reason to be preoccupied with himself, Jesus loves his disciples to the fullest extent. Washing feet was typically a slave's job, and not even a Jewish slave's job – one for Gentiles to do. Picture all the people flocking to Jerusalem at this time, how dusty the roads can get as the late winter rains turn into a hot desert wind. Footwashing was supposed to be done before the meal. The disciples pass on doing it themselves. You would only wash the feet of someone higher than you, never your peers' feet. Luke records for us they were fighting over who should be the greatest in the kingdom. Washing someone's feet during the meal is different. It's an intentional act of service on Jesus' part.

Peter, as usual, retorts Jesus and speaks his mind. He sounds humble in telling Jesus he shouldn't be doing this. Yet he is still prideful since he's dictating to Jesus what Jesus should do. A true Messiah wouldn't stoop to this level. A true Messiah wouldn't go to the cross. Jesus quickly has to explain the significance of footwashing to Peter, illumined by his upcoming cross. Washing his disciples' feet is not just a picture for physical washing, but also for spiritual cleansing. ***“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. ... Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”*** Right before he suffers for his disciples, Jesus obeyed God's law for them one last time. He completely fulfills the law of love. That makes his disciples clean.

A Sunday school teacher was once teaching her class the story of Holy Week. As the teacher slowly and artfully builds the story from the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, to his disciples cowardly deserting him in Gethsemane, to the trial before the high priest, to the mocking before Pilate, a little boy's face grows more and more furled and scowled. Finally right as Jesus is about to take those first steps to die at Calvary, the anger erupts. The little boy suddenly screams out, "No ...!" We might smile at that kindergartener's innocent attitude, but just like him, we often want to cry out to Jesus as well, "Stop it! Jesus, you don't deserve to wash your disciples' feet. If I were there, I would have been the first to wash your feet! I would have been there to stand up for you on trial! Jesus, it's so unfair!" Pride for Jesus can sound so good. Quickly we all turn into little Peters. Jesus, you *can't* do this. It's beneath you. You're to be the all-powerful Lord, not the lowest scum of the working class. You're to receive love from your faithful followers, not sacrifice your very self. Even though we think we're protecting Jesus, we're dictating to him. I'm meant to protect him, not serve my peers. I focus on serving Jesus, not others. Someone else should do that. But not me. We can't fathom that if Jesus would actually listen to our pleading to save him, he couldn't save us.

Washing the disciples' feet is not just a mere object lesson in humility for us. Footwashing was a shocking example of humble service. Going to the cross, lying imminently before Jesus, to die for the world's sin was even more shocking. Both are joined together. Jesus rejects all the pleading from us as little Peters, "Lord, this shall never happen to you!" He rejects all our nonsense dictating him to be a respectable Messiah operating to our cultural norms. Jesus rejects any divine prerogative he had. The all-powerful Lord becomes a servant for others. He stooped to the lowest position for us. He fulfilled the love of love to the unloveable. He gives us his love which bends over backwards for all those times we thought it'd require too much effort. When God sees us, he only sees Jesus' perfect love. Perfectly completed commands. Selfless actions.

Jesus does the unthinkable. He embodies his deep, selfless, humble love to us. But he does not just leave us there. Is all we can take away from Jesus here a ritual to be followed, like how Pope Francis last year made headlines when he washed inmates' feet? A strict, yearly ordinance for us? Don't miss the deeper picture. It's not just a pattern for us to do all by ourselves, but strength for us. It's strength which we get from Jesus, not ourselves. Jesus also empowers us to imitate his love.

Jesus leads his disciples to see how his actions impact them. They correctly identify who Jesus is yet often fail to understand the implication for their lives. He leads them down one big question from the greater to the lesser. ***"Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ... A new command I give you: Love one another."*** If you have ever wondered where the name "Maundy Thursday" comes from, this is it. "Maundy Thursday" means "Command Thursday." Jesus gives his disciples the new command to love one other as he has loved them. Jesus' command is not new in that it never existed before. The Old Testament also commanded us love our neighbor as ourselves. It is new in that it brings out the full implications of the old command.

Jesus takes away the stigma of lowly tasks. We love Jesus by loving our fellow Christians. We can't ever separate the two. Love is not just an emotion. It's a verb, an action. Sweeping up the house or cleaning this church is not a pointless, menial task. It's how you love Jesus by loving fellow Christians. Cleaning up after your messy kid is not just a parental duty:

it's a way to imitate Christ's unthinkable love. Our culture would not think to actually mean the question "How are you doing?" and want to listen for a half an hour. Jesus changes that. He empowers you to show that love. Our culture would not think to give up an entire off day on the weekend to be with another Christian friend going through that relational disaster. Most don't want to wade into that mess. But that's how you can love them. That's how you can show Jesus' love to them.

Do you remember those "What would Jesus do?" bracelets, a huge fad in the late 1990s? I have to confess I got one myself. Is this account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet only asking us, "What would Jesus do?" Don't forget the deeper meaning. Before you ask "What would Jesus do?" ask "What did Jesus do?" He embodied his selfless love which fulfilled every command for you and led him to the cross. Only then can that empower you to ask how you can imitate his love to others. Amen.