

Meditation – A Little Longer  
Scripture Reading – John 13:1-17, 31b-35  
Maundy Thursday, April 2, 2015  
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A reading from the gospel of John, chapter 13.

*1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

*31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." This is the word of the Lord.*

The title of the meditation: A Little Longer

What do you do when the world is about to end? Now, it may not be the end of the world—but when I'm stressed and anxious and waiting, when I have a deadline looming, a difficult task approaching, a sermon to write—I do simple, homey, comfortable things. I bake bread, or wash dishes. And last night, as my hands were immersed in soapy, hot water and the smell of baking bread filled the kitchen, I found calm in the familiar actions of washing and rinsing—and I tried, as I've been trying all week and as I try every year, to imagine this night as it was for Jesus and for his friends.

Because what do you do when the world is about to end? The disciples did not know it yet, did not know their world was so close to breaking apart in the most violent, horrific way imaginable. In just a little longer, the world will change, and change again, and never be the same. They are standing on the edge of the world—but they do not know it. They know only that they have gathered around a table

again, gathered for a meal again with their friend and teacher, who has done so much ministry around tables and at meals. And maybe their friend and teacher seems a little distracted, a little cryptic, but he's been that way many times before. Maybe, they think, he'll feel better after some simple, homey, comfortable things—some bread, and some wine. But it is almost the end of the world, and Jesus knows it.

Jesus, the Son, part of the Triune God, knows, for he is God and the Word of God. He knows what is coming and where this is going, in a way that we who know the story cannot even try to imagine. But as much as he is God, Jesus is human, too—and we can imagine what it is to be human, and facing betrayal, pain, and death. In his humanity he joins his friends for what he knows will be their last meal together before the world changes. He joins his friends knowing that he has just a little longer—and then he who is fully divine and oh so fully human will be betrayed, arrested, denied, tried, tortured, and executed.

What do you do when the world is about to end? Break bread with friends, and wash the feet of those you love. Simple, homey, comfortable things. For us, of course, foot washing is anything but comfortable or normal. But for Jesus and the disciples, sandal-wearers in hot, dusty lands, this is common hospitality—simple, comfortable, normal. Well, Jesus is never truly normal. Foot washing was common, yes, but it was offered by the host and done by servants or slaves. So we can imagine the disciples exchanging confused, nervous looks as Jesus gets up from the table, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, pours water into a basin—and kneels in front of his friends, washing and drying their dusty feet. Their dis-ease and dis-comfort are evident in Peter's response—"What are you doing?? You will never wash my feet!"

But Jesus knows that he has just a little longer with his friends — and I wonder if he takes comfort in these comfortable things, in the simple physical action of picking up the feet of his friends, of using his hands to wash the dust away and gently wipe them dry, of caring for them and tending to them with his own hands for just a little longer. Perhaps these actions, like the familiar action of blessing bread, breaking it, and sharing it with others, helped comfort him in this moment before the world changed.

But these are not just his friends whose feet he is washing. These are his disciples, and he is their teacher, and though they don't fully understand what it means, he is the Messiah. And he has only a little longer to teach them. So he teaches them to love. He shows them what this love looks like. He shows them that such love might overturn the conventions of good manners. He shows them how to comfort and care for each other after he has gone. For he will be with them only a little longer, and they cannot follow where he is going.

So in this little longer that he has with them, he does as he has always done, and facing the end of the world, he loves them. Tomorrow he will show another kind of love as he dies upon the cross — but for tonight, he teaches us to love one another as he has loved us, that great love can be an action as small as unexpectedly kneeling before someone and caring for them, and as simple as extending hospitality and welcoming all to the table.