

Maundy Thursday, Year B

GETTING WASHED UP, HEAD TO TOE

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Ella Moehlman

1Now 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. 2The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5Then 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. 6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10Jesus 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." 11For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12After 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? 13You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

31b "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little 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.' 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Washed Up



Our love is like that of the disciples, love that betrays, love that deserts, love that denies. We cannot make ourselves right or clean before God.

From Canva

He loves us to the end. He loves his betrayers, deserters and deniers.

DIAGNOSIS: Washed Up

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Eager to please

I learned early on in life to only raise my hand in class if I had the right answer. Otherwise, I'd feel stupid. It is shameful and embarrassing to get something wrong, especially in front of others. Moreover, we learn early on that when we please our superiors, we get rewarded, be it with good grades, being

the line leader, or no questions asked when we request a hall pass to use the bathroom.

Peter's fickleness in his dialogue with Jesus, his backpedaling from "you will never wash my feet!" to "then wash my head and my hands also!" makes me believe he knew exactly how it felt to want to give the right answer, to make Jesus proud, to live up to his own reputation as a leader among the twelve.

Peter's eagerness to please is not limited to the disciples of Jesus long ago but can be found present in the church today. It's in every grandchild going through confirmation classes just to make grandma happy, and every young couple scheduling a wedding with the pastor – who also is asking about getting the child they have together baptized.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Searching for reward

We want to show off how well we do in life, so that others can see us and praise us or be jealous of what we have. Isn't that what the "my child is an honor student" bumper stickers are all about? Whether we display that fact on our minivans or not won't change how well our kids are at school, but we like to take pride in our successes. We want to make Jesus proud and give him the right answer, but all for our own benefit. We want to be glorified. We trust in our own abilities to follow Jesus. We make being a follower of Jesus more about how it looks to the rest of the world than about what our heart is trusting.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The incriminating truth

As soon as our earthly rewards are in hand, we start looking for the next new thing. High School seniors get "senioritis" in the spring, employees who have put in their two-week's notice start

checking out, getting lazy and indifferent. We have it in the bag. Then comes the final answer on the test, and it is an open-ended essay question: How did you love one another as Jesus has loved you? Whether we think we are on track to make the honor list or whether we have been called into the guidance counselor's office for our failing grades, we realize we all meet the same end. We can't pass this one. We can't make the grade or meet the demands. We cannot love like Jesus loves, giving up all pretense of honor, giving up our lives. Our love is like that of the disciples, love that betrays, love that deserts, love that denies. We cannot make ourselves right or clean before God.

Washed in Love



IT'S NOT ABOUT PRIDE, BUT HUMILITY. WE ARE SIMPLY FREED AND BLESSED TO BE ABLE TO SERVE OTHERS AND DELIVER THE MESSAGE OF JESUS.

From Canva

PROGNOSIS: Washed in Love

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): My truth for yours... My life for yours

There is a reason Jesus says, "Where I am going you cannot come." He goes where we cannot go and he does what we cannot do. When we know the end of a job is near we check out, give up, ready to focus on the next thing, too proud to do the menial tasks of our old job. Jesus knew the end of his work was near,

his hour had come to depart from this world and return to his Father, yet he doesn't check out, if anything his doubles down on his efforts. He loves us to the end. He loves his betrayers, deserters and deniers. He loves you and me so much so that instead of a failing grade on our final project, Jesus gives us his A+ and takes our F. Jesus' glory is his death.

Step 5. Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Trusting, with gratitude

Jesus is the one driving around with the "my child is an honor student" bumper sticker plastered on the back of his suburban. We get to revel in the fact that we, who were going to be dropouts, get Jesus's final report card full of "Job-well-done-s." Instead of pride in our own efforts, we have trusting gratitude in Jesus' humility to stoop down and wash our slates clean. Indeed, we are washed head to toe in his righteousness!

Jesus washes everyone. He washed each of his disciples, even the one who was "unclean," Judas, his betrayer. No matter how backwards our hearts are, Jesus kneels down to wash us. We are reminded of this every time a pastor leans over someone at the font to wash them in the water and the Word.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Eager to serve

It's not about pride, but humility. As servants and messengers of the great master and teacher, the one who humbles himself, we see that we don't get to be any better than him. We get to see that there is no competition and no reward for our grades or how successful we are in life. There's no competition even for how well we can love like Jesus loves. We are simply freed and blessed to be able to serve others and deliver the message of Jesus.

The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Eve

Lighten Our Darkness

Luke 2:1-20

**The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Eve
Analysis by Michael Hoy**

1In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth

and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



From Canva

"The Humble One comes to bring peace and reconciliation with God. He is not ashamed of our own humility and darkness, but comes to welcome outcasts and to make somebodies out of nobodies."

Diagnosis: Living in the Dark

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): "Night Life"

This Christmas narrative is all about life. But what kind of life? Life under imperial decrees that send people here and there (like Joseph and Mary). Life that is born in the midst of ever-changing world events. Life of those who live out doors, like the shepherds in the fields. But all of these life stories

take place in the midst of a great deal of darkness – “by night.” That’s also where our life story begins. We live in the dark of night, no matter how bright we might think our days might be.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): “Fear”

The problem with this night-life becomes clearer when our fear is aroused. Can we really count all the ways that we are a fearful people? Oh sure, we seek to put on a good show externally. Nothing, we think, can make us too afraid or frighten us. Fearful where we might find lodging or even a birth place when there are no rooms available. Fearful of what dangers might come calling in all that is out there in the world, or in the fields and hillsides. However much we seek to keep these fears under wraps, hidden, buried within ourselves, we do not recognize, or believe, how much we are buried in fear.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): “Exposed”

What brings fear to the shepherds is not even all that dark. It is when the glory shines upon them that we hear of their fear. What is it they are afraid of? The same that we are most afraid of – of being exposed! Of having our life and all its truth laid bare in an instant, in a twinkling of an eye. We are unable to get away with it any more. There is no impunity. There is no escape from the deep dark truth of our sin. And no one is exempt. Not even politicians and power-brokers, however much they try to avoid it. All fear the penetrating light of personal and public exposure – not only before others, but before God. Yet God comes nonetheless (perhaps even in some messenger in our daily life) to expose our fear and our deep darkness within. There is no more hiding in the dark.



From Canva

Prognosis: Living in the Light

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): “Good News for All People”

But the “good news” starts with a bold acclamation from one promising messenger to call us beyond our fears. “Do not be afraid;... I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David as a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord!” Note the magnificent titles of this good-news birth: “Savior” – one who can save us and all of creation from the damaging truth of our sins; Messiah – one who has power to overcome all principalities and powers of darkness; Lord – one who graciously transfers us into his new

ownership, with all its rights and privileges. This is indeed good news – and not only for us, but for “all the people.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): “Seeing = Trusting”

This promising messenger also says, “see!” There is sight even in the midst of darkness! This promising cry comes not only as a command of God, but as the literal sight of the One who comes for us – and *how* he came! He comes in all humility, a child, a baby, a babe! The Humble One comes to bring peace and reconciliation with God. He is not ashamed of our own humility and darkness, but comes to welcome outcasts and to make somebodies out of nobodies.

Seeing is believing, trusting, this humble Child!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): “The Sound of Praise!”

Now in the darkness of night a new sound erupts over the silent realm of fear. The shepherds go out shouting, praising God! “Your night is over! Now is the light of promise and grace! For you, for you, for you... For all people, everywhere, wherever darkness would seek to keep you bound! You are loved with the light, the grace, the peace of the Christ, who has come to bring good news of great joy for all the people!” No power of darkness can stop that singing, nor fear dampen its joy! It lives, this light, within and without – pondered and treasured ... and for all!

Palm Sunday

COACHING WITH UNDERSTANDING

Philippians 2:5-11

Palm Sunday

Analysis by Ben Williams

*5Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
7but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

*9Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Author's Note: Reading Paul's letters gives us little glimpses

into the ancient world. Each community Paul wrote faced particular issues that Paul specifically addressed. I like to think of Paul as a coach for these communities: giving guidance or admonishment when necessary. In this passage from the letter to the Philippians, Paul gives one clear directive to the community: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." It may be tempting to turn Christ's actions of self-emptying into our own call to action; but, the focus of the Christ hymn is to draw our attention to what Jesus does. Our call from Coach Paul, then, is to reflect on Christ's work and how we might live into that work by rejecting exploitative power.



Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (1320) by Pietro Lorenzetti-
Source, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3944840>

Jesus embraces the vulnerability of being human for us; a divine act only God could accomplish.

DIAGNOSIS: SOMETHING TO BE EXPLOITED

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Coaching Athletes

“Winning isn’t everything. It’s the only thing. If you can shrug off a loss, you can never be a winner.” This quote from Coach

Vince Lombardi is emblematic of the challenge coaches face when success is the priority of coaching. It can easily reduce athletes to the total sum of the outcomes of their endeavors. If a player isn't producing to the level expected, then the player's value is diminished.

Of course, we can rationalize this at the professional sporting level. But it is not just coaches who face this challenge. Parents living vicariously through their children's success face this temptation. Employers or managers might feel pressure to view their workers as numbers on a spreadsheet. The value of employees, children, friends, athletes or any other human relationship can be reduced to a performative metric of our own device.

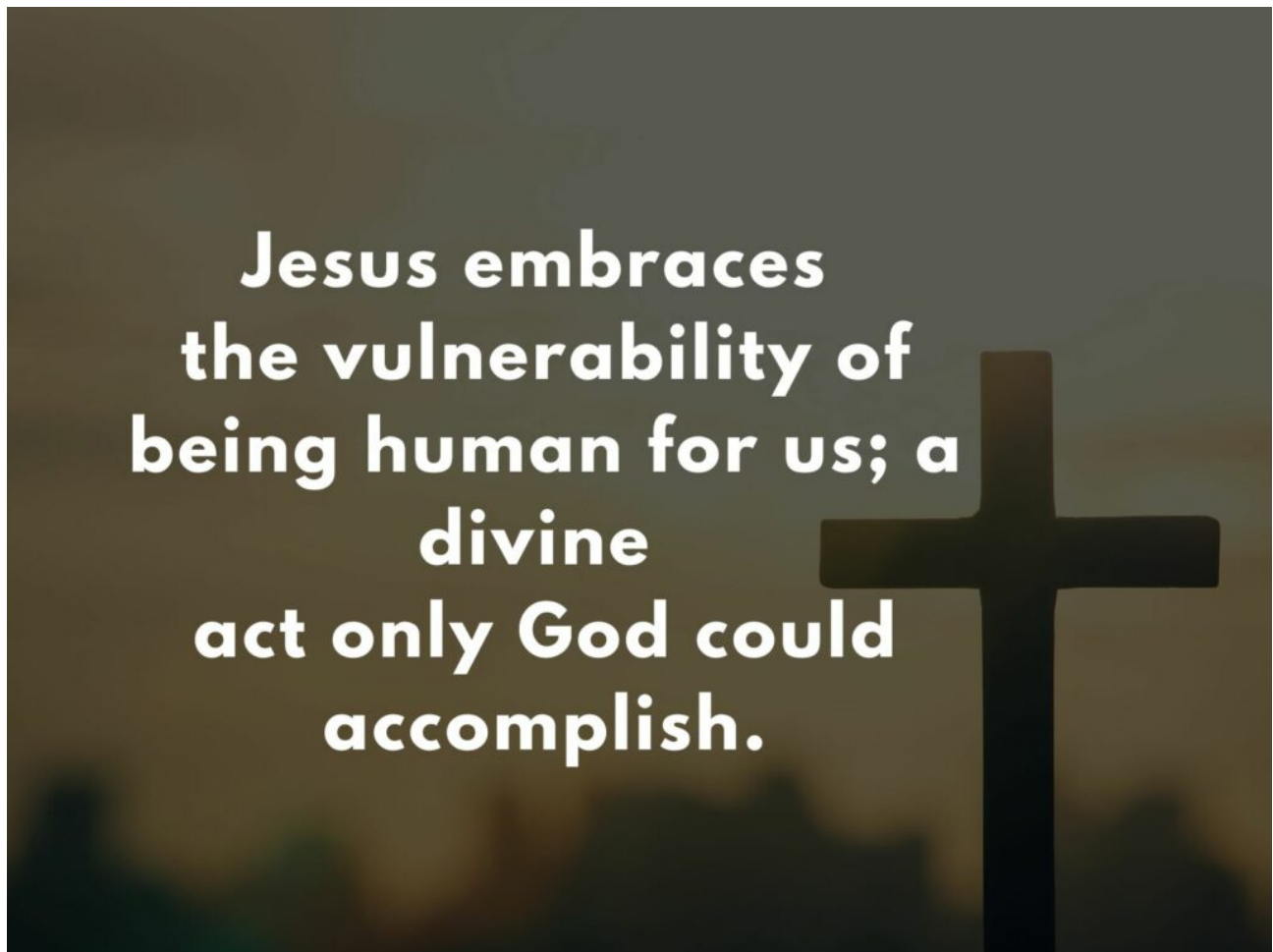
Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): A Call to Succeed

In turn, we are weighed down by pressure to perform. We become convinced that success is a measure of godliness. Those who are successful are elevated to the divine realms and idolized. Athletic prowess is considered super-human at the upper-levels of one's sport. Parents beam with pride when their child accomplishes a feat the parent could not. Fattened wallets become the only evidence to judge a business as good. Regardless of the cost, harm, or impact we buy the idea that it's okay to leverage power if it leads to success.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Left Exploited

Exploitation lurks just around the corner when success is the only valued measurement of worth. Why? Because unfounded power that claims its own divinity always wields that power to protect itself. And Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited..." So, Jesus refuses and rejects the use of exploitative power. We find ourselves chasing our own exploitation when we deny our humanity.

by claiming our own divinity; or worse, entrusting such divinity to another.



Divine Act (from Canva)

PROGNOSIS: HIGHLY EXALTED

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Found Exalted

And yet, Christ “emptied himself” of the divinity to which he rightly held claim. “And, being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Jesus embraces the vulnerability of being human for us; a divine act only God could accomplish. And he is found to be highly exalted, given a name above all names, so that all may know where true divinity lies.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): A Call to Be

This act frees us from our obsessive need to secure for ourselves the so-called success that proved our worth. Rather, we live into a call to be exactly who we are created to be: human beings who falter and persist: parents who love their children for who they are, employers who value their employees and not just their labor. Regardless of profit, benefit, or success, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to reflect God's compassionate love for all that God created, including ourselves.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Coaching Human Beings

"For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field." This quote from fictional Coach Ted Lasso is emblematic of the potential coaches have to make a positive impact in their players' lives. It can easily make a profound difference in a player's life to be seen as more than just an athlete. If a coach coaches with understanding, then the players full potential is realized.

Of course, its not just coaches who make this life-changing impact. We all have the capacity, because of God's gracious love, to see one another as more than the sum total of our actions. We all can approach one another with understanding that we are human beings—beloved by God—first and anything else second. "Let the same mind be in you as in Christ Jesus," Paul writes. May it be so.