

Maundy Thursday

HOW THINGS WORK

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Peter Keyel

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."

DIAGNOSIS: We know how things work.

Step 1 Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *"You will never wash my feet."*

We know how things work. Servants serve masters, not the other way around. It's important for maintaining order and a sense of professionalism. The world would fall apart without the ordering of society, and that rests on hierarchy. CEOs don't sweep the streets. Think of what that would do for the company's image, let alone if the CEO accidentally got hurt. We need the Secret Service to protect the president. Even if we're Christian, and know the "twist" (Jesus as master comes to serve, and commands us to do the same), it's just another way of how things work. Service is one more thing tacked on to "things we must do." Except even with this new command, things don't seem to work.

Step 2 Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *"You do not*

understand what I am doing."

The disciples have no clue why Jesus is doing what he is doing. A master stooping to wash a servant's feet is unthinkable. It upends the entire system of 'how things work' (a.k.a. the Law). Society doesn't work without the Law; even as Lutherans we confess as much. That means we need all of these hierarchies, we need the CEO to be doing her job and not be sweeping streets. Even as Christians, we fail to grasp what Jesus is doing. We take service and love and make them duties, new ways of measuring status. The problem isn't the new command, or the old command, it's that we want things to be a meritocracy and we misunderstand what Jesus is doing in the washing of the feet.

Step 3 Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *"You have no share with me."*

Peter's reliance on the Law is ultimately deadly. He tells Jesus that Jesus is going against how things work, against the Law. Yet it is Jesus who tells Peter what the penalty for trusting in 'how things work' is: no share with God. It is death. Yet we have to live by 'how things work'. It would be death not to, and we can't avoid it. Even when we add service to others (or love for others) as a new metric, we still trust in how things work, which means we have no share with Jesus and instead are condemned to death.

PROGNOSIS: Jesus knows how things work.

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *"One who is bathed...is entirely clean."*

Yet it is not Peter who dies in this story. Just as we feared, Jesus goes up against the 'how things work' of the Law and dies because of it. The story does not end here, however. God raises Jesus from the dead, and vindicates Jesus in overturning death's condemnation. Jesus has a share with God, and that share is freely given to us in Baptism. We have God's final Word for us,

vindicated by Christ's resurrection: "You are clean."

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *"You will understand."*

The giving of this gift cleanses us. It's not how well we serve, or how well we hold up "how things work." Indeed, "how things work" is the old way, a way that no longer binds our thinking or feeling. We have Christ's freedom to turn "how things work" on its head. It's not about how many people we serve, how well we love or what the consequences are for our actions. It's about Christ, given for all of us. Trust that Christ is given for us compels us to love.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *"Not only my feet, but also my hands and head!"*

There's a completely new way of doing things now. Instead of telling Jesus that he's doing things all wrong, we are driven by him to continue in his way of turning "how things work" on its side. Even though Peter immediately denies Jesus after this event, God's final Word remains for him: we see this later on Pentecost, when Peter tells the nations just what Jesus is all about. Like Peter, we have a completely new way of doing things. It's not just tacking on a new commandment on top of the old ones, but having the mind of Christ, trusting that no matter how many times we fail, or what the earthly consequences are for us, God's promise remains good for us. In trusting Christ, we follow and share our new way of doing things, freely giving away the love that Christ has given to us. Even if "how things work" breaks down, we're not done for—our new way is rooted in Christ, now and always.