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Maundy Thursday B
Peace, Seattle
March 29, 2018
John 13:1-17

THE PATIENT TEACHER

Everything in this 13th chapter of John's gospel seems to have slowed to a crawl.

Jesus knows exactly what's coming. In fact, in John's portrayal, he knows it from the very beginning. His hour has finally arrived—the hour in which he will be arrested, tried, and lifted up on the cross. The hour for him to depart from this world and return to the Father.

Yet, in spite of all that will unfold in the coming days, this last meal Jesus shares with his disciple community is devoid of any urgency on his part. There's no panic in his voice, no wondering whether he's done enough for them, no questioning whether or how they will carry on without him.

Instead, fully aware of the turmoil that's about to break lose all around him, Jesus sits at the center—the eye of the hurricane—and he is CALM.

His last opportunity to share with them—his last lecture—has arrived, and for the next five full chapters Jesus will reveal to them what he wants them to know—what they need to know—as he prepares for the final fulfillment of his mission. And he will do so ever so slowly and deliberately.

Jesus has more to say to his disciples in John's gospel than in all the other gospels combined. But at this last supper, this final meal they share together, he begins his teaching not with words but with actions.

Getting up from the supper table he takes off of outer robe, ties a towel around his waist, pours water in a bowl, and makes his way around the table washing his disciples' feet.

We can see the tension build as their exalted master becomes the lowly servant.
We hear it in Peter's incredulous tone – LORD, ARE YOU GOING TO WASH MY FEET?!

But how patient he is with those who are apprenticed to him! Patient....but firm.

And after he washes their feet, he unhurriedly puts the towel away, puts his robe back on, and resumes his place at the table. Only then do the words come.

> IF I, YOUR LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU ALSO OUGHT TO WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET. I HAVE SET AN EXAMPLE THAT YOU ALSO SHOULD DO AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU.

Head knowledge only takes a person so far. Ask anyone whose working the 12-steps.
Knowing the right thing isn't what gets you home. It's the practice. The doing.

Jesus could talk until he was blue in the face, but all that talking would only get his students so far down the road. No, he has to show them what he means.

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, he'd told them, and now he must EMBODY that love.
So before he talks, before he says I AM THE WAY AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE, before his speaks of the dwelling places which—by God's gracious design—await them; or of the vine and

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branches, or of the coming Paraclete, Jesus SHOWS his friends what he's been about and what he wants THEM to be about. He shows them the steps of the dance.

Both of our kids are rehearsing a play at school these days—a musical. If you've ever been part of a stage production you know there are phases you go through in preparing for a performance.

- You read the script to get a grasp of the story.
- You review your role and start learning your lines.
- You discover your relationship to and interactions with other players—your entrances and exits, what you do, how you look, what it means.
- You begin to internalize and embody specific gestures and actions, melodies and inflections, that will make the performance live.
- And you do this over and over and over again with your fellow actors, so that it becomes a part of you, becomes second nature.

And when that happens—when everyone on stage and behind stage gives herself/himself so that separate roles become knit into a seamless whole, THEN the performance can be something truly special—even transformative.

This, it seems to me, is what our patient Lord is inviting his apprentices—inviting us—to do.

> **IF YOU KNOW THESE THINGS, YOU ARE BLESSED IF YOU DO THEM. BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.**

You see, it's not so much the WORDS coming from our mouths that make us disciples of Jesus—though the words we say can be ever so important—even life-giving; it's our ACTIONS, what we DO, how we EMBODY Christ's love, that make us disciples.

And so the washing of feet becomes a metaphor for the myriad ways we go about incarnating Christ's love in our families, among our friends, our classmates, our co-workers, our neighbors, this community.

And so the question this text leaves us to ponder is:
How will Christ's command to love one another find expression in our lives today, tomorrow, this week?

Amen.