

## QUARTERLY RETREAT April 2025 HOLY WEEK

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*Note: The late Hallie Cowan was one of the first regional Spiritual Formation leaders, paving the way for folks like Carolyn Carney, Will Truesdell and Skip McDonald. She served in New England for many years, was deeply loved, and helped scores of staff appreciate silence and prayer. She is still missed.*

### Introduction

Note: This guide is designed to go along with the themes of Maundy Thursday, the commemoration of the Last Supper, 3 days before Easter. If you can schedule your retreat day before Easter, it might help to spend the day in a liturgical church that celebrates Holy Week. If they offer a midday or morning service, you can add that to your experience of the day. You can also spend time with the stations of the cross, remembering Christ's passion and death. However, if you can't schedule your retreat before Easter, the themes are still good ones!

Supplies: a Bible and a journal (optional: paper and crayons, colored pencils, or other art supplies; a blanket; walking shoes.)

### Preparation

Take a few minutes in silence to consciously settle yourself with the Lord. Turn off your cell phone; lay down the burdens, issues and distractions you brought with you, at Jesus' feet. Settle your body, mind and spirit in the Lord's presence. Bring your hopes and fears for the day to the Lord, remembering that He loves and welcomes you as you are.

Greet the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit with this prayer, or your own:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen (Book of Common Prayer)

### Worship

Spend some time worshipping the LORD with songs, hymns or Psalms. A suggested hymn is "What Wondrous Love is This."

Then try something creative to express your love and worship to Jesus. Choose activities that will draw you into God's presence, and enjoy your time with Him. Here are some ideas:

- If you are in a church building, praise God as you reflect on a stained glass window, an icon, a statue, a banner or other art work. What truths about God and His creation was the artist declaring? What praise is stirred up in your heart?
- With your Bible, flip through the gospel stories of Holy Week, from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to the resurrection, and thank Jesus personally for each act of love you see.
- Use art supplies to draw or create an image that reflects a truth to praise God for
- Let the Holy Spirit lead you to worship with dance, or if you speak or sing in tongues, to praise God with your prayer language.

## Scripture Engagement

### John 13:1-30

Today's reflections center on the foot-washing scene from the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he went to the cross.

Spend 30 minutes in the passage on your own, using whatever style is helpful for you, but this passage is well-suited to the Ignatian method, in which you ask God to use your imagination to speak from the passage to your heart. "This approach invites us to enter the narrative, picturing the situation and identifying with characters that populate the drama. This may eventually lead us to dialogue beyond what is given in the text, a dialogue that becomes part of our prayer." (The Spiritual Formation Bible, p.xvi)

Read the passage as if you were Peter, or one of the other disciples in the room. Or imagine Mary's feelings as she watched and participated in this scene. Imagine what it would feel like, as a faithful follower, to have Jesus, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, gently scrubbing off layers of claylike dirt formed from sweat, caked-on dust, grime from fishnets and their contents, and the filth of the city roads.

- As you experience the scene, what do you notice about Jesus? About the disciples? About your own reactions?
- Talk with Jesus about your experience, and journal about your conversation.

### Read John 13:1-30

<sup>13</sup> It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

<sup>2</sup> The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

<sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

<sup>8</sup> "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

<sup>9</sup> "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered, "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." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

<sup>12</sup> When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

<sup>18</sup> "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned<sup>d[a]</sup> against me.'

<sup>19</sup>“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. <sup>20</sup>Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”

<sup>21</sup>After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”

<sup>22</sup>His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. <sup>23</sup>One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.”

<sup>25</sup>Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup>As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” <sup>28</sup>But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. <sup>29</sup>Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. <sup>30</sup>As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

## Meditate

After reading the passage use the following three meditations to guide you in further reflection. Take time between the meditations to rest, walk, pray, or journal.

### Meditation #1 – “Lord are you going to wash my feet?”

“Don’t wash me!”

There is irony in Peter’s words, as he calls Jesus “Lord” then declares, “NO! You shall never wash my feet!” “No – Lord.” Two words that don’t fit in the same prayer. Can you identify with Peter’s horror?

The role Jesus intends to play – the foot-washer – is a role for a slave, not for the Master, not for the host of the feast. It is not even a role the guests would accept from each other. It is disgusting, demeaning, humiliating. Perhaps Peter’s first horror is to think that Jesus, his Lord and Master, would be soiled and stained with anyone’s dirty, smelly feet, on this very special, sacred night. But Peter’s horror becomes even more horrifying as he sees that Jesus intends to wash Peter’s own dirty, smelly feet. Peter doesn’t deny that his feet need to be cleaned. But the thought that his Lord Jesus would clean them is too overwhelming – too intimate – too real. “No – Lord!”

Quiet your heart before the Lord, and ask Him about washing your feet. What is it that needs to be touched, washed, cleansed, or removed in your life? Listen for the Holy Spirit to remind you, or show you new insights. Try to be as specific as possible about your need.

- Are you able to let Jesus do that? If so, ask Him to come and “wash your feet” now. Wait, watch and listen for Him to do that.
- If you feel resistance to Jesus washing you, take some time to ask Him to show you what is blocking your heart from receiving His tender ministry. Many of us in ministry find it much easier and safer to “give” than to “receive.” If you are like Peter in this way, listen as Jesus says to you, “unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” Take as much time as you need to be honest with the Lord about your heart, and to hear His word to you. Journal about the experience.

## **Meditation #2 -- "Wash ALL of me!"**

When Peter comes to his senses, and understands what Jesus is saying, he responds with spontaneous exuberance. In typical fashion, he doesn't want to miss anything that Jesus has for him. But Jesus challenges his exuberance, just as he did Peter's resistance. "You don't need a bath; you're clean already! You just have dirty feet."

When you get discouraged and begin to notice how much the weight and dirt of the world sticks to you and causes you to stumble, do you ever feel that you have made no progress at all in the Christian faith? That you really should start all over, because you are not moving forward – in fact maybe you're really moving backward?

Jesus reminds Peter, "You are already clean." Let Him remind you, "You are already clean." You have been rescued from the dominion of darkness by Jesus Christ, and you have been transferred into the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). You used to have a heart of stone, but God has given you a new heart made of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19). You have been born again, and you are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)! This is God's finished work, not your performance to pass a test.

John 13:3-4 says, "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." And then he washed their feet like a slave. Because Jesus was unshakably certain of His identity and His eternal relationship with God, he had no paralyzing fear that anything could damage or distort that reality (not even crucifixion!). He did not need to keep His robes on as a sign of His status, or keep His hands clean and untainted to remain pure, or defend Himself, or even consider Himself in any way at all. Knowing who he really was, he was completely free to humble himself and care tenderly and vulnerably for his dirty-footed disciples, taking up the towel of a slave.

Take time now with this Servant King, to search your heart. Marvel at who you are – your identity in Christ – and what God has done in you. Give Him thanks that you don't need to be washed all over again – because through Christ, you are clean. Let go of any places where you are trying to defend your honor or reputation (through ministry, or other good efforts) or any places where you are looking out for your own interests, out of fear. Delight with Jesus that there is nothing that can remove you from your place of honor as God's beloved child in His Kingdom. Write your insights, feelings, conversation with Jesus in your journal.

## **Meditation #3 – "I have set you an example"**

In John 13:14 Jesus says, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." What does it mean for us to love Jesus' followers the way Jesus loves them? Ask Jesus to show you His heart for the people that you daily come in contact with, as you reflect on the love He demonstrated uniquely for each of His disciples:

- What was it like for Jesus to love John, "the beloved disciple" to the end?
- Or Mary, his mother, who had been told by God that a sword would pierce her heart?
- What was it like to love impetuous Peter -- one moment valiantly defending Jesus, and the next, denying he ever knew Him?
- Particularly focus on what it was like for Jesus to love Judas to the end.

The gospels make clear that Jesus knew ahead of time that Judas would be used by Satan to betray Him and send Him to His death. And yet, Jesus washed Judas' feet – and broke the bread of the Passover with him. Even with that foreknowledge, Jesus did not protect Himself from being deeply hurt by this man who appeared to be a committed follower and disciple. As believers, we can just about guarantee that we will be deeply disappointed, painfully wounded, hurt or betrayed by Christian disciples and friends at some point in our journey.

- How do you love someone like that, "to the end"?
- What is it like to love people like the disciples who are sinners, rebels, failures and scoundrels, or people who are in deep grief?

### Conclusion

As you end your retreat, review your time to gather the gifts and graces that you've received during your time. What would you want to tell God about your time? Spend some time in thanksgiving and ask God for what you need as look ahead to the rest of your day.

### Benediction

*Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.*

I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.

*Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.*

By this shall the world know that you are my disciples: That you have love for one another.

(Book of Common Prayer)