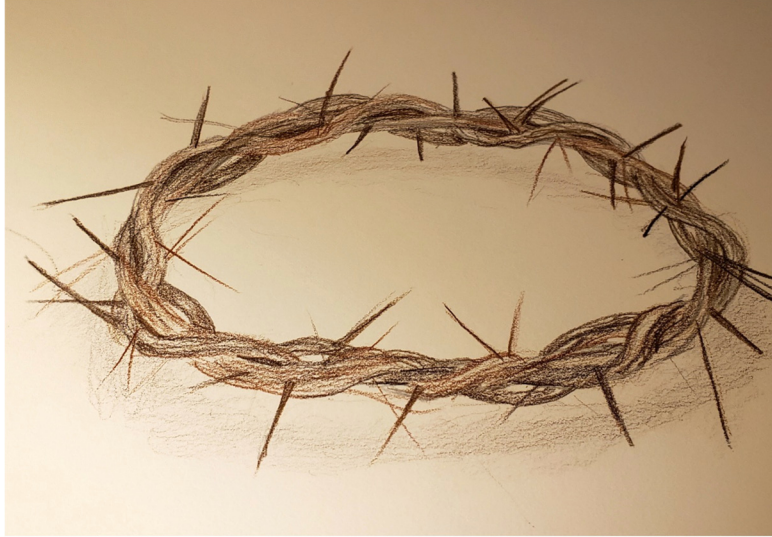


# Maundy Thursday Meditation

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



*"Crown of Thorns,"* Sue Anderson, Immanuel Presbyterian Church

## Gospel Reading: [John 13:1-17, 31-35](#) (NRSVue)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." <sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

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

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

### **MEDITATION – "Loving to the End"**

Psychological studies have shown that we remember best what happened to us LAST at an event or encounter.

Let's say we went to a concert and the whole evening was amazing and the music was powerful and moving, but if the electricity went out or the singer lost his or her voice on the last song—that last thing would stick more in our minds. But if we were at say a party, and the evening started off awkwardly. Maybe we didn't know anyone and we felt left out. But if towards the end of the night, we met someone new and had an incredible conversation, we would remember more that last positive thing because it was freshest in our minds—even though most of the night was terrible.

Here on Maundy Thursday, Jesus was doing one of his last things with the disciples—washing their feet. He chose this act as one of his last acts, to stick in their minds, to stick in our minds. This was really important to Jesus: be a person who washes other people's feet. Follow my example. Do what I do. Follow my lead. Live your life to serve others in a surprising way. Blow away others' categories, by your humility and your love.

You see, by washing their feet, Jesus loved the disciples to the very end, meaning COMPLETELY, FULLY, PERFECTLY. From the very beginning to the very end, Jesus loved. To love to the very end, to love through and through, takes confidence, a blessed assurance. Jesus knew what he needed to do. He knew his mission like the back of his hand. He knew his hour had come. He knew it was going to be difficult. He knew that all things had been entrusted into his hands by the Father—even the smelly feet of his disciples. He knew he would be leaving this world and that he was returning to the Father. He came from God and was going to God. And so... he loved. He arose from the supper table. Laid aside his outer garments. Took a towel and tied it around himself. Poured water into a basin. Descended, kneeling down and washed his disciples' feet. And dried their feet. To love is to deliberately serve. Jesus' kind of love is sacrificial, it cares for others.

Footwashing is Jesus' show and tell lesson. A show and serve visual sermon. His footwashing foreshadowed his crucifixion.

Jesus washed all twelve disciples' feet. Jesus washed Judas' feet—his betrayer. He washed Peter's feet—who would deny him three times. All of the disciples deserted Jesus—yet he washed all twenty-four of their feet. And Jesus lovingly washes our feet, knowing full well who we are. Our failures, our histories, our misunderstandings. What we *will* do wrong in the future. And yet he still washes them. We are made clean. Jesus had the confidence to love and serve by footwashing, which was considered a slave's job. It wasn't beneath Jesus, even though the disciples didn't understand what was going on or why he was doing this. He knew they would come around.

We need to accept Jesus' love. It takes humility to do this. To have Jesus wash our feet means that we realize our feet stink. Like Peter, false humility is actually pride: YOU will never wash MY feet. We need the humility to accept Jesus' love the way he offers it. We need his cleansing. Notice the confidence of Jesus: If you don't allow me to wash your feet, you have no part of me. Peter then swings to other extreme—going beyond Jesus' offer: Well, then, my feet aren't enough. Jesus wash also my hands and my head. *Peter, Peter*. All that is needed is your feet. You are washed and you are clean when you accept what I offer—no more, no less.

But it doesn't stop with receiving Jesus' love. You first need a theology of receiving, before you can have a theology of giving. Let me wash you. But also, follow my example. Be like me. Now be someone who washes others' feet. Follow Jesus' lead. Let Jesus live through you, wash through you, serve through you, love through you. If you know this, you will be blessed if you do this. Don't let love just be a concept, let love be concrete in your life and relationships.

Jesus is so in tune with the Father that he knows he will be glorified when he is crucified. God is glorified through Christ's ultimate and costly love. The pain of crucifixion will lead to the joy of glorification. Jesus transforms what is shameful, feet and crosses, into something beautiful and life-giving. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good news."

The only way to get to Easter Sunday is through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Passion will lead to pleasure. Crucifixion to Resurrection. In the first 12 chapters of John, Jesus kept speaking over and over about LIGHT and LIFE. Now he was giving a new emphasis, a new command that would be repeated from chapter 13 to the end of the book:

*LOVE. LOVE ONE ANOTHER. LOVE THE WORLD, the way I love.*

A sacrificial love. A serving love. A footwashing love. A dying love that never dies. This is what sets us apart. This is how people know we are Jesus People.

The new movie "*Jesus Revolution*" is based on a true story. It's in theaters now. I loved it. It's one of the best Christian movies I've ever seen. *Cheers* and *Frazier* actor Kelsey Grammer plays Pastor Chuck Smith. In the late 1960s Pastor Chuck is faced with a decision. He's at a crossroads.

What will he do with the hippies and flower children? Will he rail and preach against them? Or will he love them? He does some serious soul searching and realized that Jesus would love them. And so he too should love them. He opened the doors of his small church to the smelly and shoeless hippies. Not everyone in the church approved. They worried about the hippies' feet dirtying the shag carpets.

Watch this scene that movingly depicts how Pastor Chuck decided to love and accept these young people hungering for something deeper than what the drug culture was offering. And a movement was born.

"Jesus Revolution" movie scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2166EJ-B5E8>

"I give you a new commandment," says Jesus, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Amen

—John 13:34-35 (NRSVue)

Featured Art: "*Crown of Thorns*," Sue Anderson, Immanuel Presbyterian Church

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