

Maundy Thursday



First Congregational Church of Anoka

United Church of Christ

an Open and Affirming Congregation

March 28, 2024

Welcome

Centering Music

Gideon Scheeler

The Church Bell Rings

We Gather at the Table

One: On this Maundy Thursday, we affirm that the Church took Jesus's invitation seriously – that we were to reenact this meal, celebrate it together, and remember him and his gracious love whenever we eat together.

Many: We remember you, O Jesus.

One: In this holy sacrament, we join with all who have come before us and so many others who gather as we do this night to partake of blessed food and drink. We embrace the promise of this meal, a hope that around tables of blessing and in remembrance of one to come to us in Love, that we might create a community of love across the whole earth, one that finds unity in a shared meal.

Many: We long for that unity, O Jesus.

One: We remember as well how the author of John tells us the story of Jesus serving his friends by washing their feet. This work, the work of a servant, is a holy invitation to us, that we might create community in much the same way as we do around the Table. But rather than sharing food, we share service. We humble ourselves, letting go of our arrogance, our ego, and our hubris, that we might see the beauty and love that comes when we wash each other's feet.

Many: May your Spirit bless us on this night of remembrance and service, Holy Jesus.

One: On this night of remembrance, we recall the story that comes to us first from the Apostle Paul: that on the night Jesus would be betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

Many: "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

One: In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,

Many: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

One: For as often as we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim our Lord’s death until he comes again.

Many: Come, Holy Spirit! Bless us, and bless this meal as we pray the words that Jesus taught us.

Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).

We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.

Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

One: Now, as those who have been invited by Jesus to eat, serve, and remember, we come to this Table, praying that its grace might infuse, nourish, and sustain us toward the manifestation of a Beloved Community. Come, for all things are made ready.

We will celebrate the sacrament together by coming forward to the Table.

You may take a piece of bread, dip it into the cup, and eat (Intinction),

you may eat a piece of bread and drink from a small cup,

or you may use a peel-and-eat safety container.

Communion Hymn (*during the partaking*)

“One Bread, One Body” (page 7)

**(refrain) One read, one body, one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.**

**And we, though many, throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.**

Gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman [and] man, no more. (refrain)

Many the gifts, many the works, one in the Lord of all. (refrain)

Grain for the fields, scattered and grown, gathered to one for all. (refrain)

One: Let us pray in thanksgiving.

Many: We thank you, Jesus, for the gift of this meal, for the challenge of your call, and for the many ways you showed us in your own actions how we might help build a Beloved Community on earth. Embolden us to seize our resources and use them to feed the world. Help us to grasp the humility to serve others as you have served us. And when we fall short of these outcomes, forgive us and empower us to try again and again. Amen.

Scripture Reading – John 13:1-17, 34-35

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.

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."

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Many: Thanks be to God.

Hymn

“An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare”

The tune is O WALY WALY (#362), which we perhaps know best as “Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire.”

**An upper room did Christ prepare for those he loved until the end:
disciples still gather there to celebrate their risen friend.**

**A lasting gift Christ gave his own: to share his bread, his loving cup.
Whatever burdens bow us down, he by his cross shall lift us up.**

**After the meal he washed their feet, for service, too, is sacrament.
In Christ our joy shall be complete: sent out to serve, as he was sent.**

The Ritual of Footwashing

One: Friends, the Scriptures remind us often of the symbolism of water, through which we receive and remember the grace of God. That grace is both love and forgiveness. That water is both Baptismal and cleansing. In water we hope to glimpse ourselves as God does, free from dirt and shame and home to God’s own Image. And yet, we confess:

Many: We do not always see that Image in ourselves. We do not always see that Image in our neighbor.

One: In the act of washing each other’s feet, we seek that clarity. In the act of lowering ourselves to serve another, we seek to embrace the humility of Christ, who did not equate service with subservience.

Many: God, may this water cleanse us even as we cleanse others; may it wash away all hesitation and shame, freeing us to celebrate your Image fully manifested in each person we meet.

One: As a church that is always struggling to become more open, caring, accepting, and inclusive, we affirm the teaching of Paul that in the Spirit there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female. May these waters of blessing cleanse us from all stigmas and help us to live in solidarity with our neighbors.

Many: Come, Holy Spirit!

When so invited, the first group should come forward and take the provided seats.

The Pastor will wash the feet of the first person.

That person will, in turn, wash the feet of the next person until all have been served.

If you do not wish to wash another’s feet, someone will fulfill the task for you.

You may also have your hand washed instead of your foot.

We repeat this process until all who desire washing have been served.

Special Music

“Come, Thou Fount”
Nancy Benz (piano) and Mike Benz (cello)

arr. Breeze

Prayer of Thankfulness

One: Let us pray.

Many: O God, we give you thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ and for the grace shown to us in his life of service. We thank you for symbols of love and humility. We ask that you will strengthen us for the service to which you call us, that we may find in lowering ourselves, in washing, and in all other acts of mercy the fullness of life that we see in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn

“Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love’ #498

**(refrain) Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.**

**Knelt at the feet of his friends, silently washing their feet,
Jesus, you acted as servant to them. (refrain)**

**Neighbors are rich and poor, varied in color and race,
neighbors are near and far away. (refrain)**

**These are the ones we should serve, these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbors to us and you. (refrain)**

**Loving puts us on our knees, showing our faith by our deeds,
serving the neighbors we have from you. (refrain)**

**Kneel at the feet of our friends, silently washing their feet,
this is the way we should live with you. (refrain)**

* Benediction

Postlude

Gideon Scheeler

*You may be seated as you listen to the Postlude. If you choose to depart at this time,
please speak gently as you exit out of respect for those who choose to listen.*

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

It's not about footwashing, you know. If that's all it was, I would totally get how many people are NOT into it. A lot of people think feet are gross! Athlete's foot, toe jam, funky nails that are taking a year to recover after getting smashed. Touching another person's foot isn't everyone's bag. So I'll say it again: it's not about footwashing.

It's about *service*. It's about serving your neighbor. It's about lowering yourself—literally in the case of footwashing—to do something kind for your neighbor.

Beyond the whole weird foot thing, the resistance to footwashing is almost certainly cultural, as well. Probably just as much now as way back then, footwashing brings up notions about social class. To wash another? There's a class element to that. It carries a subtle connotation that the work of a servant is not humble so much as humiliating. In a world dominated by patriarchy, we can see how such things play out. The cultural assumption is that nurses are women, because serving—and often washing—others is women's work. Recently in Congress, an old man in power mistook the woman sitting in front of him in a committee hearing for a flight attendant, when in fact she was a pilot. He claimed to not know why he said such a thing, but we know the truth. Pilots are leaders, and leaders are men. Flight attendants are women (or, sometimes, gay men).

So, when Jesus lowers himself—both spatially and socially—to wash the feet of his friends, Peter says, “You will never wash my feet!” Out of his deep love and respect for his teacher, he doesn't want Jesus to humiliate himself. He doesn't want Jesus to do the work of a woman or a slave. He's Jesus! He's the Messiah! Everyone should be washing HIS feet, not the other way around!

What Peter struggles to understand is that there's a difference between *humiliation* and *humility*. Humiliation is what happens when you force someone else to socially lower themselves. It's about shame, class, and rank. It's about power, and dictating that the one you're humiliating doesn't have any. *Humility* is about releasing hubris, releasing arrogance, releasing the terrible anti-gospel of class and rank and loving your neighbor through service. That he did this in such a provocative way with the whole foot thing just makes the lesson that much more challenging, because we, just like Peter, are squicked out by feet! I kid; we're actually squicked out by service.

Oh, it's not like we don't understand how it's *supposed* to work, despite the ample evidence showing how much we have to learn about servant leadership, about humility, about rejecting the capitalistic, patriarchal “wisdom” of the world that says there are jobs too dirty for respectable people. You don't even have to watch *Dirty Jobs* to figure this out! You just have to bus someone's dishes.

I'm not trying to shine my pedigree here; I'm simply trying to live out my faith AND lead by example when I share with you that I sometimes bus dishes for folks during coffee hour and funerals. Folks will be sitting at a round table, deeply engaged in conversation, and it's clear that they're done eating. So, I will sometimes quietly just start picking up their stuff. And when I do, almost every single time, folks respond, “Oh, you don't have to do that!” To which I always respond, “I know.”

But maybe I do have to do that. Maybe we all do, if we take Jesus washing the feet of his friends seriously. There's so much to unpack in that “Oh you don't have to do that!” Part of it is the imperative to clean up after ourselves. Part of it is, “Oh gosh, that's not pastor's work!” As if rather than trying to live with humility, I'm humiliating myself by bussing someone else's dishes. But if Jesus bent down to wash his friends' feet, shouldn't we all learn from him that serving each other isn't an act of subordination, but an act of love?

In Protestant churches, we only celebrate two sacraments—rituals instituted by Jesus that are, in some sense, an outer sign of an invisible grace. For us, that’s Baptism and Communion. Our Roman Catholic neighbors add to this Confirmation, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. But what I’ve never really understood is why the Church hasn’t historically considered footwashing to be a sacrament. Doesn’t Jesus ordain and institute it in the Gospel of John? Doesn’t it speak to a deep, divine truth that we are all called to be servants to each other, rejecting shame and inequality in favor of a truly profound mutual love? Why aren’t we washing each other’s feet on a monthly basis?

Now, don’t fret. I’m not actually calling for that. A sacrament probably shouldn’t make people go, “Ew.” So if we’re not going to ritually scrub between the toes, what can we do?

The answer’s simple enough. I’ve pointed to it already. *Serve each other.* Bus dishes. Plunge a plugged toilet. Make coffee for others even if you don’t drink it yourself. Host Coffee Hour. Join the Diaconate. Rake your neighbor’s yard. Don’t restrict your snowblower’s use to your own driveway. Pick up trash when you see it blowing around the street. Call the City when you see a pothole that needs filling. Remember always that, “It’s someone else’s job” is sometimes a roadblock to grace. And always remember what Jesus said: “if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash each other’s feet.”

With all that this implies.

Amen.

◆ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ◆

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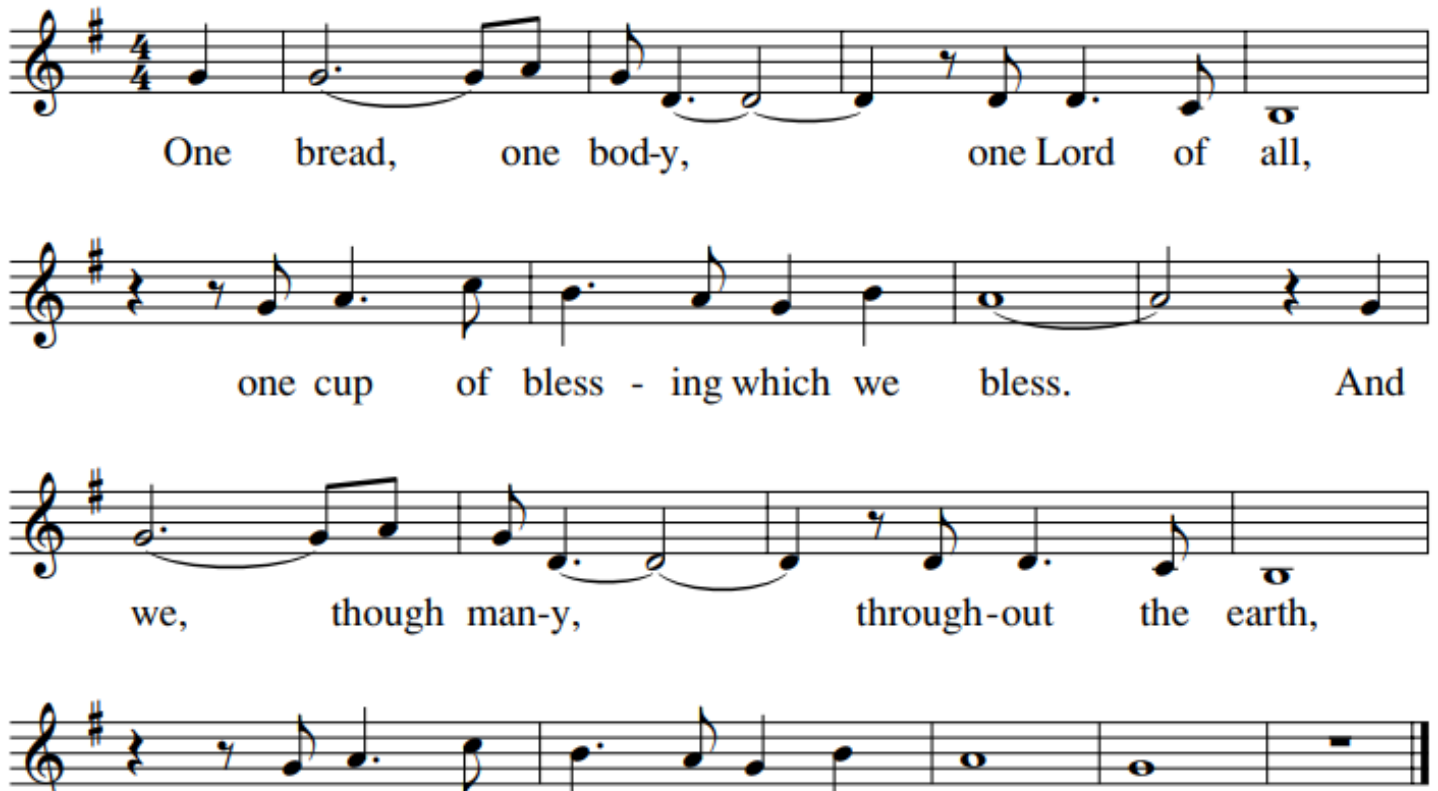
Text-to-Give: 844-334-1477



First Congregational Church, UCC of Anoka is an Open and Affirming Christian Community for all. We affirm that the image of God is most fully reflected in diversity. We invite all people to share their energy and talents in full participation with our community. We welcome all individuals and families of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, race, national origin, socioeconomic status, age, mental and physical health or ability, or belief. Together, we celebrate these and all other facets of one’s essential being.

One Bread, One Body

Refrain



One bread, one bod-y, one Lord of all,
one cup of bless - ing which we bless. And
we, though man-y, through-out the earth,
we are one bod - y in this one Lord.

Verses



1. Gen - tile or Jew, ser - vant or free,
2. Man - y the gifts, man - y the works,
3. Grain for the fields, scat-tered and grown,
wom - an or man no more.
one in the Lord of all.
gath-ered to one for all.

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:16; 17, 12:4, Galatians 3:28; the *Didache* 9; John Foley, SJ, b.1939
Tune: John Foley, SJ, b.1939
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Please join us tomorrow night –

Good Friday

– to experience anew the story of Jesus’s arrest, trial, and death.
The service will feature three extended piano selections from Koki Sato.
The service will be livestreamed on our YouTube channel.

The service will be held at 7:30p.m.

Then, join us as we celebrate the Good News of Christ’s resurrection on

Easter Sunday

along with a celebration of Koki Sato’s time among us during Coffee Hour
Cake will be served; you are invited to bring Koki gifts and greetings!

Services at 8:30a.m. and 10:30a.m.