

Lord's Supper Liturgy

Votum

Yarrow, May 9, 2010

Sing: Ps 92:1

Law

Sing: Ps 139:13

Prayer

Collections

Sing: Ps 142:4,5,6

Scripture reading: John 13:1-17

Sermon: John 13:1b

Sing: Ps 35:5,6

Lord's Supper Form: Hy 1A

To table: Hy 44:1,2

At table: Ps 16:1

Ps 122:3

Hy 37:3

Hy 38:1,2

Prayer

Sing: Ps 133:1,2

Benediction

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Relating to the person beside you can be a difficult challenge. The problem is that in this fallen world the person you live with or the person you work with or the person you drive with can be obnoxious and irritating, selfish to the core. Add to that: we ourselves can be equally obnoxious and irritating, and selfish to the core. But what tends to bother us is not our own imperfections; in our relations with others it's the *other's* weaknesses that jump at us and trip us up. As a result, we witness and we experience tension in marriage, coolness towards the people in the office, distance even with people in the congregation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, chief Prophet and Teacher, has perfectly revealed to us the will of God for us, including how God would have sinful people live together. In the passage we read from John 13, Jesus Christ set the example all His people are to follow day by day in relation to those around them, whether in the kitchen or in the bus, in the workshop or in the office.

The chapter has its setting on the evening before the Passover Feast in which Jesus was sacrificed as the Lamb God gave for the sins of His people. According to vs 1, Jesus knew very well that His time on earth was up, that He would soon be sacrificed and then leave this world to return to the Father. John then adds that Jesus "now showed [His own] the full extent of His love" (vs 1b).

The reference to “the full extent of His love” automatically sends our thoughts to His sacrifice on Calvary, for was it not there, when He laid down His life, that He showed the “full extent of His love”? Yet, brothers and sisters, John is not thinking here about Jesus’ work on the cross, but is thinking of the anecdote he records in vs 2ff. When supper was being served, Jesus “got up from the meal, took of His outer clothing..., wrapped a towel around His waist..., and began to wash His disciples’ feet” (vs 2f). In *that* act, says John, Jesus “showed [His disciples] the full extent of His love.” How, we wonder, is this act a demonstration of “the full extent of His love”?

We can answer that question by noticing that Jesus’ action is in fact the work of a slave; ‘normal’ people don’t do this for each other. In fact, the practice was that people before the Passover would wash their entire body at home, then walk to the place where the Passover meal was celebrated with other family members, and upon arriving (if the home belonged to someone well-to-do), a servant would wash the dust from your recent trip from your feet again. In the place where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover, there was no slave and none of them had a slave to do the job, and so the washing didn’t happen. Now Jesus during the meal does the task the slave should have done before the meal.... And it’s true: that’s indeed a vital aspect of Jesus’ display of love.

But did you notice, congregation, how the Holy Spirit introduced Jesus’ actions in vs 2f? Not only is there a reference to the evening meal being served, there’s also a reference to the devil already prompting Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. Furthermore, there’s also a reference to the fact that Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under Jesus’ power, and at a minimum that surely means that Jesus knew what was going on in Judas’ mind. In fact, later in the chapter John tells us that Jesus identifies the person who is going to betray Him (vs 21,26). But observe now what Jesus does; despite knowing of Judas’ insincerity and evil schemes Jesus proceeds to wash –whose feet?– the feet of *all* His disciples – including Judas!

More, when He came to Peter, this leading disciple protested that he did not want Jesus to wash his feet. After a bit of conversation, Peter agrees that Jesus ought to wash him completely, from head to toe – and Jesus indeed proceeds to wash Peter’s feet. But make no mistake, congregation: if Jesus knows what going on in Judas’ heart, Jesus equally knows what makes Peter tick. In fact, in vs 38 Jesus tells Peter (in the hearing of the others) that “before the rooster crows” Peter would disown Jesus three times. Yet Jesus goes to wash even Peter’s feet!

What is the point, brothers and sisters? Is it not this: though Jesus knows He is dealing with sinful people He does not let their sinfulness get in the way of His serving them. Though there is something seriously crooked and selfish in Judas’ attitude to Jesus, and in Peter’s also, Jesus continues to serve them, even wash their feet. Then it is a wonderful thing indeed that Jesus went to the cross for sinners, and we do well never to stop marvelling at the surprise of His self-emptying for the undeserving. But seeing Him wash the feet of the man who would soon kick Him in the gut, seeing Him wash the feet of another who would soon publicly disown Him puts vivid colour to what Jesus’ love really looks like. Going to the cross for another (let alone pay for another’s sins) is something we

can't do and don't have to do. But the sort of service that's caught in the notion of washing another's feet *is* something we can do; that's the stuff of daily interaction. That is why Jesus can speak the words of vs 14f: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." More, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." And the example is *not simply* washing another's feet, but the example is *washing the feet of those whose attitude to you is wrong* – the Peters and the Judases of your life! To serve people you don't dare to trust, to be the least and wash the feet of those you know will stab you in the back: that concept is so foreign to common human relations. But this is the example Jesus sets before us, with the command to do likewise.

What this has to do with Lord's Supper? The table directs our attention to Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary, a picture we're so very used to. But let's dare to admit it: the people for whom Jesus laid down His life included you and me – and it's in us to deny Him and to betray Him and to run from Him. *He knows that, and yet died for our salvation!* In the grind of daily life it is for us to be the least for the advantage of another, regardless of whether the other deserves it or not. Whether we trust the other with our shirt, let alone our wallet, is – says the Lord in John 13 – neither here nor there on the issue of whether we'll serve the other. The "full extent of His love" included that He washed the feet of *sinner*s, of His betrayer and His deceiver. Your love is to follow that example, in our marriages, in our homes, in our workplace, on our street, and even in the pub you happen to drift into.

How does the Lord's Supper Form put it again? "For the sake of Christ, who so exceedingly loved us first, we shall now love one another, and shall show this to one another not just in words but also in deeds." Indeed.