ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS
Greenville, SC
April 5, 2007
Maundy Thursday
John 13:1-17; 31b-35
Vicar Elise Stringer

Feet First

The parade is over. The glorious procession with palms has come and gone and the time has come for Jesus to say goodbye, to prepare for his death and depart from the world.

"Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew his time had come to depart from this world and go to the Father."

As I read this scripture I began to think of the time 4 years ago when I was preparing to leave for a mission trip to Honduras. My family and friends understood my desire, my passion to go and help people far away from home, but they were still a little sad to see me go. The night before I left for Honduras my family and friends and I went out for a nice dinner, and shared a cake for my birthday, which I would celebrate with the mission group thousands of miles away in the week to come. It was a wonderful celebration- a time to be together, a time to celebrate my life and my work. It's only natural to gather with those you love to celebrate before you leave for a long trip.

"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end…"

In preparation for his death, His departure from this world, Jesus gathered His closest friends, His disciples, and together they shared a meal, a meal we will share together tonight, over 2,000 years later in remembrance of that last supper.

This night, Maundy Thursday, is the beginning of the Three Days of Easter— Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and The Resurrection of Our Lord. These Three Days are the observance of the mystery of our salvation- Jesus' life, death and resurrection.
The mystery which plunges us ***FEET FIRST*** into the death of Jesus Christ and brings us again to new life with Him!

Maundy Thursday is a night focused on remembrance and priorities. In Jesus' last meal with the disciples He stoops down and washes their dirty feet in an act of sacrificial love. He so humbly demonstrated our first priority: to love one another: ***FEET FIRST!!***

"Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him."

FEET FIRST…it wasn't the disciple's hands, head or face that Jesus washed at that last meal together. Jesus performed the act of a slave and washed the disciple's feet. Stooping down, water and towel in hand Jesus touched one of the least attractive parts of the human body- the feet.

Our feet are often the part of our body we keep covered, because we're embarrassed that they're ugly, too big, too small, awkward or misshapen. A part of our body that is vulnerable, maybe even fragile.

I've been thinking about what it might be like if together as a congregation we washed one another's feet. I imagine if we were honest with ourselves and one another, we would admit that such a humble act could be a bit uncomfortable. The thought of leaning down to touch and wash each other's feet probably wouldn't bring crowds of people flooding down this aisle. In fact, such an intimate act of service might evoke strong emotions in us, just as they did in Simon Peter.

When Jesus knelt down to wash Simon Peter's feet, Simon Peter seemed confused, maybe even angered by Jesus' bold statement of love and forgiveness. ***"You will never wash my feet Lord…he said."***

But it was when Jesus told Simon Peter that if He didn't wash his feet then Simon Peter would have no share with him, that Simon Peter became passionate about the foot washing. So passionate that he wanted more than his feet washed. ***"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head."***

But it was the feet Jesus focused on. The part of our body that carries us places, the part of our body that takes us where we are needed, where we want to go and often where we don't want to go. Feet…they are what take us to the places ***Jesus*** calls us to…

FEET FIRST! It's how we put on our pants, how we get into the car, how we test the chilly waters of a deep pool. ***FEET FIRST***, it's the way we do a lot of things in our world.

So it's fitting that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ chose to wash the feet of those who loved Him, who followed Him. Jesus, their master, chose to bend down and wash their dirty feet.

The master performed the act of a slave.

With this simple gesture of love, almost silently, Jesus turned the tables, plunging the disciples at that last supper and all of us here tonight ***FEET FIRST*** into lives of discipleship.

"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? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet…For I have set you an example'…"

An example: Wash one another's feet…serve one another, love one another, heal one another- ***FEET FIRST***. To be with Christ in the ministry of service, we, his disciples must accept the role of a servant.
So how is it that we wash one another's feet? How as Jesus' disciples do we accept the role of servant?

With arms outstretched, Jesus goes to the cross to die, feet first, in order that we may have life abundantly.

On bended knee, with towel and basin in hand, Jesus gathers us together, feet first, to live as the Church, His body in this world.

With towel in hand, Jesus us sends us, feet first, out into the world to serve others.

With water for healing, Jesus uses us, feet first, to minister to those who are hurting, to those who are sick.

The words of a powerful hymn resonate with me…*Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.*

Just a few hours ago, Irvalee told me that when she was in the doctors office this week, talking about her upcoming hip surgery, the Dr. asked her who would be taking care of her after surgery, and Irvalee very directly said, "The Church. The Church will take care of me."

That is how we wash one another's feet; that is how we plunge feet first into lives of discipleship.

For me, this Holy Week has been filled with images of foot washing at St. Michael.

Yesterday someone came into our office carrying bags of food to donate to our food pantry. Just a few years ago, that same person was on the receiving end of those groceries. That person yesterday truly understood what it means to serve one another. To love one another. What a gift that on Wednesday in Holy Week they came by our office to drop off food, because they thought someone else might need it.

And yesterday as Pastor Robert and I returned from a visit at the hospital and drove around back to park, we noticed two Easter baskets tucked in the door of the shelter. Easter baskets that I'm sure will brighten the day of the two young children and their mother living beneath our office.

Love one another, serve one another.

We have clean communion linens every service because someone took them home and washed them. The grass out-front always looks beautiful because someone comes to cut it. We have children who can sing every word of Jesus Loves Me because their Sunday School teacher taught them to do so.

Three homemade meals in the freezer down stairs have been prepared by one of our members for someone who might not be able to do it for themselves.

A new commandment: ***"Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know you are my disciples!"***

He has called us to love one another as He has loved us and when we do this, everyone will know WE are His disciples. The world will know by our love, the world will know by our willingness to stoop down and wash the feet of our neighbor.

Feet…they are what take us to the places ***Jesus*** calls us to…tonight as we gather in this place, ***where*** is Jesus calling us to?

St. Michael, where is Jesus calling you to go… ***FEET FIRST***?

On that last night before his death, Jesus washed the disciple's feet and even tonight He washes our feet. We are His chosen, named and beloved children, called to go out into the world and share that message of love and forgiveness with everyone we meet.

This very day, Maundy Thursday, prepares us for the journey.

The Maundy Thursday liturgy is prepares us because it focuses on three significant actions. First, we began the service with a confession of sins and an announcement of forgiveness. This brings to a conclusion the Lenten discipline of repentance that began on Ash Wednesday. Second, as the church tonight we are called to obey Jesus' command to follow His example and wash each others feet. And lastly, we celebrate Holy Communion, the meal of salvation; so that we may take our place at the supper Jesus shared with his disciples on that last night.

In these Three Days, beginning tonight, we celebrate the mystery of our salvation- the life, the death and the glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ. and we are called to continue in His ministry of service, love and healing.

And the Good News of the Gospel message is that yesterday, today and tomorrow God is with us, strengthening us with his own body and blood to do this work of service, this work of love in the world.

Do we know where our towel is? Have we filled our basin with water? Are we ready and willing to stoop down and wash our neighbor's feet?

The parade is over. The glorious procession with palms has come and gone. The time has come for Jesus to say goodbye, to prepare for his death and depart from the world.

He said…"Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, but where I am going you cannot come. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you."

May together we pick up our towel and jump FEET FIRST into this life of discipleship that Jesus calls us. Let us live this new commandment: ***"Love one another as I have loved you."***

Jesus has shown us the way…the time has come. Let us follow Him, ***FEET FIRST!***

Thanks Be To God.
Amen.