

**BETWEEN TIME**  
*Sermon for Maundy Thursday B-Jn 13:1-17, 31b-35*  
LPC, 4/2/15

Last summer I took the first installment of my sabbatical. I was away for four weeks, longer than any previous absence from Lawrencefield Parish Church. Beginning about this time last year I started to make preparations. I arranged for sacramental coverage, and I entrusted my various administrative functions to various church members. I wanted to be sure I left this congregation prepared for life without me. I needed to reassure people that I would be back, but I also had to make sure, to the best of my ability, that they had the tools to cope until my return.

In a way that is what Jesus is doing in the lesson we just heard. He knows he is going to be arrested and be killed. He also knows he will return, but that until that time the disciples are going to be bereft and confused. They are going to make some serious mistakes, but Jesus wants to leave them as well-equipped as he can.

So what does he do? Basically he does three things.

First, he washes their feet. This is a servant's job. Jesus is letting the disciples know that his role among them is one of service. But that's not all.

When a person you regard as your superior, as the disciples regarded their teacher Jesus, performs a task that is not only technically beneath him, but even beneath you, he is demonstrating humility. This is not the false humility of self-deprecation. This is the true humility of love: the humility that doesn't even pause to think that the task might be demeaning or even disgusting: like a parent changing a diaper, or a holding a friend's hair back when she is sick in the toilet, or a spouse spoon-feeding his life's partner late in life.

The message here is that the disciples are not to put limits on their love. This is the theme for the other two things Jesus does.

The second thing Jesus does is give them a "new commandment": that they love one another as Jesus has loved them. Jesus has just shown them how to love: humbly, self-sacrificially, giving no thought to what is appropriate to their station.

The third thing Jesus does is to give the disciples himself, in the form of bread and wine. "Do this to remember me," he will tell them. He knows that they will need reminding of the night's lesson of love and sacrifice.

Now, consider this. We are in the same position as those disciples in that upper room. We live in the "between time": between Jesus' first coming, and his coming again. Jesus is no longer physically present, just as Jesus was not physically present to his disciples between his arrest and his resurrection.

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The words Jesus said and the acts he performed to prepare his disciples for his physical absence, until he returns, are words and acts said and performed for our benefit, until Jesus returns at the Second Coming.

We are no less bereft and confused in Jesus' apparent absence than the disciples were. But if we follow Jesus' upper room teaching until he returns we will be OK.

In a few moments we will strip the altar of all its adornments. For those of us who love Jesus, this is a wrenching ceremony, forcing us to contemplate life without Jesus. It is good that we do this, so that we never, ever, take for granted the radical gift of God's self-sacrificing love for us. But it's hard.

In our Maundy Thursday grief, we can take consolation in doing what our Lord told us to do in his absence: serve one another, love one another, and remember Jesus.

And through all our days, until Jesus returns and we are reunited intimately with the love of God that preceded the universe, we can take consolation in like action: In service, in love and in remembrance.