

HISTORIC SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH
Richmond, Virginia
Maundy Thursday
April 5, 2007
Bruce A. Gray, Rector

The other day I was listening to a favorite piece of music, Aaron Copeland's, *Appalachian Spring*. In that wonderful music he incorporates the old Shaker hymn, *Simple Gifts*. It reads like this,

***'Tis the gift to be simple,
'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'twill be in the valley of love and delight.***

Maundy Thursday, the remembrance of the last meal Jesus shared with his friends, is a moment when we celebrate two simple gifts that Jesus gave to them, and gives to us. When we remember them as we do on this day, we too will be "in the valley of love and delight."

The first gift is an example to live by. Jesus did what no master, no lord, no teacher, no leader should do, he took the role of the servant. He could have expected to be waited on. He could have expected that someone would wash his feet, but he got up from the table, took off his robe, took a towel, and washed the dust off his friends' feet. Gently, yet firmly, he washed the dust, the dirt, and the grime off their feet. It was a humble and humbling moment. Peter objected. He knew his place. Jesus was in charge. It may also have been a moment of too much intimacy. After all, Peter was a tough fisherman. "Don't mess with my feet."

Jesus insists. "I don't need to wash you all over, Peter, just your feet, that's enough." If only the twelve were there, maybe there were more, but twelve times, at least, Jesus washed their feet, even the feet of Judas. A simple act; a simple gift. Later, when the dust had settled, and these friends came out of hiding, they began to grasp what Jesus had done. His gift was an example of how they were to live their lives; how they were to serve one another as he had served them. Their leadership, in the future faith community, was to be a servant leadership. They were to proclaim the good news that, in Jesus, the Kingdom of God had come near. They were to heal the sick, and take care of the poor and those in need. They were to be the servants because Jesus had served them. Today, the gift comes to us. Our call, our command is to follow Jesus' example. Just as Jesus washes our feet, we are to be the servants, who care for one

another and for those in need. 'Tis a simple gift and a profound example of love and delight.

The second gift is just as simple. It is the gift of remembrance, community, and intimacy. During the meal, Jesus took the most basic and simple things of life, bread and wine, and turned them into his very life. He gave those friends a simple, yet powerful way to remember him, and to continue to share in his life. Paul also puts it simply, "This is my body that is for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood...Do this in remembrance of me."

Today, tonight, we gather at the same table. We lean close to one another to gather support and strength, and we remember. We remember that Jesus broke the bread, blessed the cup and shared it. We remember that Jesus hosts this table; our table, his table. We share in the same bread and the same wine, and in that bread and cup, we share in Jesus' own life, right now.

So come to the table. Know that Jesus has already washed your feet. He has already treated you in the most intimate way. And he gives you his life. Simple gifts, clean feet, bread and wine; the gift to serve and the gift to be free to serve. Come to the table and be fed. Know that Jesus gives himself for you and for me. In these simple gifts, we become one with Jesus, one with each other, and one with those we serve. *Amen.*