

**Rev. Adrienne Meier**  
**April 1, 2021, Maundy Thursday**  
**St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

## **Forgiveness is the Bridge**

### **John 13:1-17, 31b-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. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 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.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 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." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

*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, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

*"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

In 2017, the LaGrange Police Department, of LaGrange, Georgia, took a mostly unprecedented step and apologized for failing to intervene in or investigate at all a lynching that occurred there in 1940 to man whose name was Austin Calloway. Most Black residents were aware of the dark crime in their community's past, but most white

residents were not. In an interview with the New York Times, the Chief of Police, Louis Dekmer said, "It became clear that something needed to be done to recognize that some things we did in the past are a burden still carried by officers today. Institutions are made up of people, and relationships go like this: Before you trust somebody, you need to know that they know that they did you wrong, and that you're stepping up and apologizing for it." The move was, unsurprisingly, controversial, and Dekmer openly admitted that it is one merely one small step of a great many needed to repair relationships in his town. The Chief issued the apology in church, and one of Calloway's descendants, Deborah Tatum, rose to reply: "I speak your name, Austin Callaway, and ask God for forgiveness for the people that did this inhumane thing to you. Some might say 'forgiveness'? And I say to you that I believe God when he tells us that there is power and freedom in forgiveness." There is power and freedom in forgiveness. And that is what tonight is about. Forgiveness. In this Georgia town, this act of forgiveness may yet be the way to cross a giant divide. Forgiveness is a bridge.

Jesus and his disciples gathered on this night for their last meal together. Jesus knew what was to come, and, John says, out of love, Jesus washes their feet, blesses their gathering, and gives a new commandment based in love, the heart of all reconciliation. Jesus did all of this with his friends who would flee, deny, and betray him. He instituted loving practices, foot washing, the sharing of a special meal - a meal where we proclaim Jesus is really present with and among us - we who flee, deny, and betray him each and every day. The disciples may not have known what was to come, but imagine how they felt when they returned to this table again and again and again remembering the message of love, the reconciliation that Jesus was offering them even before they fled, denied, and betrayed him. This meal reconnected them with their Lord and Savior because forgiveness is a bridge.

To seek forgiveness is to confess your sins and wrongdoings. Frederick Buechner once wrote, "To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the Golden Gate Bridge." Admitting your flaws and weaknesses, your tendency to rage at other drivers. Admitting the dumb things you say in the office that, just maybe, might be making people uncomfortable. Admitting that you've spoken to your family in ways you regret. Admitting the hate you've harbored in your heart, your jealousy. Admitting these will not drive you from God, but rather, confessing your sins, seeking forgiveness is how God loves us all the more. Forgiveness is a bridge.

But our sin doesn't just drive a wedge between us and God, it separates us from one another. So what about you? What do you have yet to forgive or to seek forgiveness for? What regret do you harbor that occasionally sounds in your head, "if only I'd done this, or said that, or spoke up when." Perhaps you are like me, most of my regrets aren't "that bad." The other person has likely forgotten them. And that may well be true. But if you are aware enough of what you have done or left undone to regret it, then you know

enough to confess it. And sure, on the one hand, you might be fine. It might be water under the bridge. But consider this. If you confess — if you seek to make it right — it will no longer be what is under the bridge which you have been praying is flowing past. If you confess, what was pain and hurt, error and regret - this can become the bridge itself. Sometimes, of course, we seek forgiveness from others, but it is not granted. Even then, I think, we have laid a foundation in the hopes that one day we might be reconciled. Even if we never have opportunity to cross it, forgiveness is still the bridge.

In a few moments we will ask you to pause the video, and in that time to reach out to someone you have hurt and to seek forgiveness. You could write a letter, make a phone call, or use the brief ritual in the bulletin linked below the video. And so, beloved, in the name of the one who reached across the chasm for you, who turned your sin into a bridge of reconciliation, I charge you with that same work: seek forgiveness.

Amen.