

# Love Feast

Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren  
March 24, 2016  
7:00 pm

## As you arrive

Find your seat and prepare yourself in quiet. The back of this bulletin provides some things to ponder. Read over the prayer, and be ready to pray it together.

### The Goodness of the Lord

These words from Psalm 116:13 are often used by Christians during communion. That is a reasonable setting, as the bread and cup point to the sacrifice Jesus made for us to have eternal life.

But Brethren have historically understood communion to take place within the fuller love feast, which begins with examination. How does our life reflect gratitude for the goodness we have received from God? Is it visible in our daily walk? Love feast also includes time to wash one another's feet in a demonstration of service to our church family. How are our relationships with our church family?

What can we give back to the Lord for all the good things he has done for us, as the psalmist ponders in verse 12? Christian theology teaches us that while we can do nothing to either earn or repay God for the goodness we have received, we do show our commitment to God by a life of faithful Christian living. During love feast, as we both lift up the cup of salvation and bend our knee to wash one another's feet, we are expressing our love for God and one another by the way we treat others.

## Welcome

### Unison Prayer of Examination (back of bulletin)

O Lord, we are your servants, gathered here because of the goodness you have shown us. We want our words of thanks to you to match the choices we make each day. May our love for you be reflected in the ways we love our neighbor, and our enemy.

Reveal those places where our lives are not consistent. We have been set free from sin, so deliver us when we put those chains on again. Forgive us, we pray, and make us whole. Amen.

“The Goodness of the Lord” and “Unison Prayer”  
were written by Tim Harvey, pastor  
Oak Grove Church of the Brethren  
Roanoke, Virginia

## Hymn

“I hunger and I thirst”

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Move to the Feetwashing Circles (take your hymnal with you)

# Feetwashing

## John 13:1-17 in 3 voices

- 1 - <sup>1</sup> Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.
- 2 - Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
- 3 - <sup>2</sup> The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.
- 1 - And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,
- 2 - <sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.
- 3 - <sup>5</sup> 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.
- 1 - <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,
- 2 - "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
- 1 - <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered,
- 3 - "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
- 1 - <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him,
- 2 - "You will never wash my feet."
- 1 - Jesus answered,
- 3 - "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."
- 1 - <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him,
- 2 - "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"
- 1 - <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him,
- 3 - "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."
- 1 - <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said,
- 3 - "Not all of you are clean."
- 1 - <sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them,
- 3 - "Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them..."

## Meditation

“Do as I have done to you,” Jesus said. And so we are gathered in this place and at this time to do as he has asked. In so doing, we remember that long ago night, putting into our hands and feet these passionate events that led up to a cross. The intent is to make of our lives a remembrance, living into our calling as servants of Christ. This calling pulls us in two directions: giving and receiving. It is one thing to serve another person, to give from the heart. It is quite another to be on the receiving end. Both stretch us, and not always in comfortable ways. However, we cannot follow Jesus without serving and being served.

Perhaps you remember the gospel story from our worship only 11 days ago. It came from the chapter of John immediately preceding this one. The setting was not an upper room, but the home of three siblings: Lazarus, Martha, and Mary – dear friends of Jesus. Only days earlier, Lazarus had died, and Jesus called him forth from the tomb. On this post-resurrection-of-Lazarus day, Mary got down on her knees to anoint the feet of Jesus with costly oil. It was no towel that she used to dry his feet. It was her hair. The fragrance of that perfume filled the room. And Jesus received from his friend Mary this act of loving service, because receiving is important.

I wonder if those who gathered a few nights later in an upper room could still smell the fragrance of that oil, and what it meant. Jesus interpreted her washing his feet with costly nard as a preparation of his body for death. As you get ready to wash and be washed this evening, can you smell the oil? In our remembrance, the cross is not far away. Death is near. But something greater than the end of earthly existence permeates the air. Breathe in the Holy Spirit, the very fragrance of God. It is this presence that empowers us to give and to receive. The Spirit stretches us. The love of God moves us beyond our discomfort. The risen Christ shows us the way, even as we remember Jesus’ last earthly moments with his disciples.

What I love about this ordinance of the church is that it is so down-to-earth. To care for the feet (or, if the knees no longer cooperate, the hands) of another is to meet them in a very different place. And yet, it’s also common space. Feet and hands get dirty, and need washing. “Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?” But it doesn’t stop there. “Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.” Can you smell the fragrance? ... Pray with me.

## Prayer

Living Christ, who graciously received the service of Mary in preparation for death, and who knelt at Peter’s feet and set an example for us to follow in life, bless these moments of singing and washing.

Holy Spirit, move in our hands and our hearts as we receive and give these acts of love. In so doing, create in us a deeper longing to serve others in the world around us and to recognize the gifts they give in return.

Gracious God, may the words we speak, the actions we undertake, as well as our thoughts and feelings as we do so, be like a fragrant offering, pleasing to you, our rock and redeemer.

Amen

## Feetwashing Hymns *(sung as needed)*

“Will you let me be your servant”	307
“Breathe on me, breath of God”	356
“Blessed assurance”	332
“Have thine own way”	504
“Lord I want to be a Christian”	444

## Move to the Communion Tables

# Fellowship

## Psalm 116:1-2,12-19

- <sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, because he has heard  
my voice and my supplications.
- <sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his ear to me,  
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
- <sup>12</sup> What shall I return to the Lord  
for all his bounty to me?
- <sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the Lord,
- <sup>14</sup> I will pay my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people.
- <sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of his faithful ones.
- <sup>16</sup> O Lord, I am your servant;  
I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.  
You have loosed my bonds.
- <sup>17</sup> I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice  
and call on the name of the Lord.
- <sup>18</sup> I will pay my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people,
- <sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the Lord,  
in your midst, O Jerusalem.  
Praise the Lord!

## Meditation

From circles of chairs to tables around which to gather, such is our worship space this evening. This is our holy place now, face to face, just like on that night of nights long ago when

Jesus shared a last meal with his disciples. The story as we have received it connects this dinner with the Passover Seder, an even more ancient ritual which goes back to the Exodus of God's people from slavery in Egypt. For thousands of years, our Jewish brothers and sisters have gathered around similar tables and remembered how God broke the chains of their ancestors' bondage. "Why is this night so special?" is the question from a child that begins the retelling of the story. With food, scripture, and song hearts young and old bear witness. All around a table.

I recall a table in my youth that helped set the course of my life. The church in which I grew up had a relationship with another congregation. Ours was predominantly white. The other was mostly black. This was the mid-sixties, mind you, below the Mason-Dixon line. The battle for civil rights was being fought on the streets of America. It was not a huge step for two churches to eat together around the same table, mixing races, but it was a step.

I was just a boy at the time, oblivious to much of the turmoil around me. To be honest, I remember nothing about the church service upstairs that surely preceded this meal. Nor do I recall any of the food shared or the eating together. All that sticks in the upper room of my memory is the woman who sat across the table from me, a rather hefty woman – weighty not only in pounds, but also in spirit. And the color of her face was dark as night. I confess that, as a young, rather introverted boy, I was a bit intimidated by this large woman.

And she asked my name. "Peter," I replied. She smiled with a smile as radiant as a sunrise, and said, "Peter, that's a wonderful name." She then proceeded to tell me all about the Bible character, Peter. Having attended Sunday School from the moment I was able, I'm sure I had heard his story many times before. But this time it took. To this very day, can you guess who is my favorite Bible character, the one I most associate with? Peter, the sometimes bumbling disciple who wouldn't at first allow Jesus to wash his feet, who got it all wrong at certain points – like when he denied Jesus 3 times before the Good Friday crow of a rooster, but who also became the rock upon which the church of Jesus Christ began.

That woman invited me into the story. To this very day, I look upon that moment as the beginning of my call to ministry, even before I was baptized. And it happened around a table... I share this because I want you to make the most of this time, around these tables, this evening. This is not just any meal. This is our holy place now, face to face. Honestly, I am glad we don't eat in silence, as is the practice in many Brethren congregations. I don't believe the disciples were silent around that upper room table long ago.

However, they were focused upon the Passover, and no doubt filled with questions. They knew something was brewing on the horizon, though I doubt they realized events were that close at hand. In but a few hours, they would leave the table and head to a garden for prayer, where Jesus would be betrayed and arrested, and the next day crucified.

This is a night of nights. This is the Lord's table. Allow the holiness of it to permeate your conversation. While the weather or the Orioles might be a place to start, be mindful of all who sit around this table. This may be a calling moment for someone, a turning point, sacred space only realized later in their life's journey. We may never fully know the impact of this time

in the life of someone gathered around this table with us, but remember – if this is the Lord’s table, then Jesus is among us... Let us pray.

## Prayer

Together, we lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon your name, O Lord. In the presence of those gathered around us, we affirm that each is precious in your sight. We are your servants. You have set us free. And so we offer to you our thanksgiving, not only for the simple meal we are about to receive, but for sacredness of these moments of remembrance. Bless them and us. In Jesus’ name. Amen

## Sharing a simple meal

# Communion

## Regathering Hymn

“Let us break bread together”

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## 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” <sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. <sup>30</sup> For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

## Meditation

A piece of unleavened bread sits on the table in front of us, lovingly prepared using an old recipe. Its meaning takes us back to the Exodus, when the Israelites were instructed to travel lightly and quickly as they escaped slavery in Egypt. “*The people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders*” (Exodus 12:34). God provided a way out of bondage long ago, and that very moment was for them the time to step forth, unencumbered by the things that can weigh down a journey.

Fast forward to the Maundy Thursday night we are now remembering. The journey of Jesus had reached its much crucial moment at that Passover meal. In only a few more hours he would be arrested, tried, and crucified. And in this poignant moment, he took this bread, gave thanks for it, and shared it with his disciples. *“This is my body,”* he said. *“This is my body,”* we remember. There may be no yeast in this bread we will soon break, but we - the body of Christ - are called to leaven the loaf. Jesus once said, *“the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened”* (Matthew 13:33). Are we living in ways that help others to rise in Christ? *“Examine yourselves,”* Paul wrote.

Jesus died that all may live, taking upon himself our sin that we might no longer be weighed down by it as we follow him toward the promised land of God’s kingdom. We remember this as we break bread. You will note that each piece of our traditional unleavened bread is pierced by several holes. Through them we remember his death upon the cross – the nails in his hands and feet that held him there, the spear hole in his side that quickened his passing. Each piece also has two parts, for we break it together across the table, remembering that *“if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him”* (Romans 6:8).

Likewise, a cup sits on the table next to the bread. *“I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,”* the Psalmist sang (116:13). In this fruit of the vine, we remember that, like a lamb upon an altar, Jesus was sacrificed for our sake. From those holes in his body poured his life. *“A new covenant in my (i.e. Jesus’) blood,”* is how we remember it this evening. No longer does an animal need to die for us to be reconciled to God. As it says in the book of Hebrews, *“he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself”* (9:26).

Furthermore, we no longer we need scapegoats or violence to reconcile us to one another. Bloodshed is not the Jesus way. *“For he is our peace,”* Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2:13-15); *“in his flesh he has made (Jews and Gentiles and all warring factions) into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace.”* When we drink from this cup, we remember this promise of God fulfilled in the death of Jesus, a new covenant.

In olden days, we would pass around one cup from which all would drink. Modern sensibilities against the spreading of germs has lead us to each person drinking from their own cup. In similar manner, we long ago shifted from wine to grape juice out of concern that even a little alcohol could become a stumbling block to someone among us struggling with addiction. Even so, remember that, in reality, we all drink from the same cup. *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,”* Jesus says to us. *“Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

## Prayer

Please join in blessing this bread and cup with a unison prayer found in the back of your hymnal, #787.

Almighty, merciful, and loving Father,

we are gathered in your presence  
to celebrate the memorial of the broken body  
and shed blood of your Son.  
Make us worthy to sit at Christ's table as his friends.  
In this supper, let our hungry souls be fed  
with the body and blood of your beloved Son  
through the gift of the Holy Spirit.  
May Christ live in us and we in him.  
Give us assurance through the breaking of bread  
that we are partakers of your covenant.  
May we grow in faith, love, and willingness  
to carry the cross of Christ.  
In his name we pray. AMEN

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## With Bread and Cup

“This bread which we break is the communion of body of Christ.”

“This cup of the new covenant is the communion of the blood of Christ.”

## Closing Hymn

“Move in our midst”

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## Benediction

Go now:

Go in safety,  
for you cannot go where God is not.  
Go in love,  
for love alone endures.  
Go with purpose,  
and God will honor your dedication.  
Go in peace,  
for it is the gift of God to those  
whose hearts and minds are in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

by Earle W. Fike, jr  
Taken from *For all who Minister*,  
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