

Sermon for Sunday, March 1, 2026

John 13:1-17

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

From Isaiah 29:16 the prophet declares about God: "You turn things upside down! **Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall the thing made say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of the one who formed it, "He has no understanding"?"**

We are told the story of Jesus washing his disciple's feet in today's gospel reading. Verses 3&4 establish Jesus' great power and then proceed to flip this power on its head. Jesus is both the most important person in the room and the least important one who is wiping the feet of his followers. "You turn things upside down."

We begin by thinking more deeply about Jesus' identity. Is he totally divine; king of the universe? Just how holy is he? Just how important is he? The culture of Jesus' time was all about rank. Who had a higher status? Who had a lesser status? It was important to know your rank because it would determine how you acted toward any person you had chance to meet. Living as he does in a culture where it's all about rank where does Jesus stand on the ranking ladder? Bottom, middle, or top?

If you place him at the very top, then at this meal he is acting as the host. He is welcoming people into the space and inviting them to get comfortable. It would be like any of us acting as a host; inviting people into our home and asking if they need a glass of water, or a cup of coffee, or do "they need to freshen up?" If the guest says yes, then you would provide for their needs. That's your job as host. The difference between our times and the days and times of Jesus is that in Jesus' day a servant would have brought the refreshments or acted to provide for the needs of the guest.

From a purely ranked point of view, Jesus as the divine one, belongs at the top of the ladder and there is little reason for him to demean himself by acting beneath his station to assist his guests in freshening up.

If you place him at the very top, then what business does he have washing anyone's feet? Washing feet was the task of a servant or slave. It was a task given to the lowest folks on the ranking scale.

"You turn things upside down." So what is Jesus doing in this story? As Jesus removes his outer clothing and ties a towel around himself, it is a "debasing" of his status. He is lowering himself on the ranking ladder.

Jesus is demonstrating in the most graphic way possible that the human institution of ranking has it all wrong. Jesus is turning the ranking system upside down. In a day and age when many are concerned with their rank, Jesus says Stop! He humbles himself and takes on the tasks normally assigned to a slave.

In our present day and age when many are concerned with their status, with the amount of money in their bank account, with the power that comes from position, status, and money, Jesus again says, "Stop!" Jesus' example challenges us to humble ourselves and take on the tasks normally assigned to those lowest in rank in our society.

For just a moment, imagine that you are Jesus, the divine one. As the divine one, you know things about people including who will betray you and who will deny you. As the divine one, Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him. And yet, Jesus washed his feet, just as he washed the feet of all of the other disciples. In the other gospels we are told that Jesus served Judas the Lord's Supper, just as he did for all of the other disciples. Would you have had the strength of character to kneel before your betrayer and wash his feet? Would you have had the strength of character to serve your betrayer the Eucharist?

Recently I had a conversation with a friend and reminded them that in our baptisms we are claimed by God forever. As a baptized child of God we are also forgiven. This friend agreed that these are universal teachings of the church. I went on to say that Adolf Hitler was baptized in the Lutheran Church in Germany and that as such he was claimed by God. So the question then is: would Jesus have washed Hitler's feet? Would Jesus wash the feet of Governor Tim Walz? Would Jesus wash the feet of President Donald Trump? I believe the answer is yes.

Jesus, the divine one, lowered himself to the position of servant and washed his follower's feet including Judas and Peter. Jesus, the divine one, served his betrayer and his denier the bread and the wine. He blessed the physical elements telling his betrayer and denier (and us) that the bread and wine are now his body and blood. He said, "this is my body *given for you* and *this is my blood shed for you.*" With every taste, with every swallow we are allowed

to wonder “how can this be? How can it be that Jesus, the holy Son of God was willing to act as servant for all humanity? How can it be that he was willing to go to the cross for us and for our salvation? There are some realities that are nearly beyond human comprehension.

We cannot explain *why* God “turned things upside down.” We cannot explain *why* God loves us so much that God sent God’s only son—Jesus—to live among us on earth. Love is a most amazing and powerful force. Those of you who have borne a child know that the rush of feelings that comes over a person at the sight of that newborn in your arms—that’s love. Those of you who have had the privilege of falling deeply and truly in love with another human know what it feels like to experience love. And yet, these feelings are just cheap imitations of God’s love for us.

No, we cannot explain *why* God loves us so much. But we witness the power of that love when we hear the story of Jesus washing the disciple’s feet. We witness the power of that love when Jesus turns the world upside down and demonstrates the lengths to which God will go to show us the depth of God’s love for us.

Jesus turned things upside down and our world has never been the same. Amen.