

2015_04_02 Maundy Thursday
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Entering the Personal Space of Christ Together

John 13:34-35

INI

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. Amen.

We turn our thoughts to the closing verses of our Gospel lesson for this evening,

John 13:34-35

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In the fellowship of His body and blood, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, dear fellow brothers and sisters in Christ,

How close are you willing to let others get? A wave good-bye? A handshake? A hug? A foot washing?

It is estimated that in the United States, the average conversation boundaries are about 4 feet, whereas in Europe it is more like 2 feet. It can be a bit of a culture shock when we travel to other countries to find someone we hardly know giving us a hug or even a kiss on the cheek. To further the shock, many of these other cultures also don't have the same hygiene expectations that we are used to. Where water resources are scarce, where commercial smelling products are virtually non-existent, you will likely find that people don't practice the same ceremonial hygiene rituals we are used to. So what happens when someone comes to our doorstep, having spent months without a toothbrush, weeks without a bath, days walking about on dirt paths in sandals, how close are you willing to let them get? When you find someone who just doesn't smell the way you expect people to smell, or look the way you expect people to look, or act the way you expect people to act – when that person comes into your personal space, what will you do?

In America, we like people best at a distance. A mind you own business mindset. After demanding people keep themselves clean, well groomed, well clothed, and potentially

perfumy – after all the hygiene rituals, then we want them to keep their distance. So we each define our personal space. We each defined boundaries for who gets in and who stays out. Each of us has a sense of how close we are willing to let people get, not just physically, or hygienically, but more so personally; and so we say – that’s far enough.

However, when it comes to the fellowship we share here, in Jesus Christ, what are these boundaries and who gets to define them? Who gets in and who stays out?

This Maundy Thursday as we gather in this personal space where we share the body and blood of Christ, we are given a “maundatum” – a mandate from our Lord:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

As one body who partake of that one bread, we are called into a new personal space – boundaries established not by us, but by him who lived and loved us to the end. As disciples of Jesus, we are drawn into a new communion – disciples who are **Entering the Personal Space of Christ Together.**

So what are Jesus’ boundaries? A wave good-bye? A handshake? A hug? How close is he willing get?

The water splashes in the silence as he kneels down and pours out the pitcher into a large bowl. The day was growing late and Jesus knew that his hour had come. His disciples sit in shocked silence, as he removes his outer garments, and wraps a towel around his waist. Like a Gentile slave, he’s goes to his hands and knees and one by one, he takes their smelly, dirty, sand coated feet into his holy hands. And he says to them, “Afterward, you will understand.” But Peter doesn’t understand. This is too close; that his Lord should get this close to him, a sinner; that Jesus should to bow his face to Peter’s feet was not right – Peter sees him approaching and says: “Lord never!”

But he doesn’t understand, this was how close Jesus must get. He must get face to foot with his disciples. He must bring them into His own personal space in a most personal way. “If I do not wash you, you have no fellowship with me.”

In a way that revealed more than just dirty feet, Jesus would enter his disciples’ personal space and cleanse them. He would enter into their thoughts, their heart, their sins, and with water splashing in the silence, he kneels down face to feet with sinners.

So Jesus' removed all boundaries. At a time when he was most vulnerable, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, he would open himself to the guilt and condemnation of our most personal sins. He would go willingly. He would offer himself, his life, face to foot with sinners, as they delivered him from the judgment hall to the cross.

He removed all boundaries. No longer would this holy, sinless, Son of God be separate from sinners. But he would lay himself bare; as they removed his outer garments, whipping him and lifting him up on the cross, his body and blood would be exposed for all the world to see; for us to see; for us. As he has already said to his disciples, "when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself."

And in this he draws us into his personal space. He institutes a new covenant, a new fellowship; one which draws us to the cross, to His body and blood, a fellowship which draws us into the love of Christ, where he gives us a new commandment, to break down barriers and the boundaries of personal space, so that here in this congregation there would be only one complete and totally united communion.

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We each have our own sense of personal space. And each of us has defined boundaries for who gets in and who stays out. Each of us has a sense of how close we are willing to let people get, before we say – that's far enough and no farther.

But how close are you willing to let Jesus get. When God's word starts pecking and prying and opening wounds that we would rather were calloused over. When that Word is wielded and sharper than any double edged sword, and reveals the dirty tracks we've walked, our unclean thoughts and acts, the times we've exalted ourselves over others, will Jesus be allowed into your personal space?

This is what the Lord's Supper is all about. Let a Christian examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Examine yourself to know what this means when Jesus gets face to foot with you. At first we might react like Peter, "never Lord!" Not you, to kneel at my feet, to be my servant – but this is what it means to be his disciple. To let Christ remove those boundaries of the law that would keep God away and receive him within the boundless love of the gospel as the one who comes to serve us.

So Jesus visits us in Word and Sacrament to cleanse us. The waters of baptism splash in silence as we make no excuses for what we've done and we drown that old man under foot in repentance. And we approach the holy table with no boundaries. We enter the personal space of God where the love of Christ is placed into our hands and poured out into our mouths. We are gathered into the communion of His body and His blood, and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. There is no closer bond that we could have with God – for we have entered the personal space of Christ together.

And what do you see as you look around? Look around you for a moment and see – you do not enter this personal space alone.

In this individualized, mind your own business, 4 feet conversation boundary culture — we definitely have our own sense of personal space. Each of us has defined boundaries for who gets in and who stays out. Each of us has a sense of how close we are willing to let people get, not just physically, but personally; and so we say – that's far enough.

But should it be so in this culture; this fellowship? A wave good-bye, a hand shake, but no more? When is the last time you've hugged a fellow Christian? There used to be a time when Christians would show their unity with one another by a kiss on the cheek. It was the kiss of peace. It is our Lord's Maundy Thursday mandate:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Some time ago while I was conducting a worship service at Batavia Rehab, I noticed a woman sitting in the recliner near by with her socks off. She woke up when we started the service and about half way through she asked me – "can you put my socks on my footies?" I ignored her. So a few minutes later and again after that – "can you put my socks on my footies?" Now there are many things residents ask me for that I don't normally consider my place to deal with. And feet are especially not something I jump at the opportunity to deal with.

But it made me think of Jesus, bowing down, face to foot with his disciples and I wondered, am I be willing to do this? Would you be willing to get that close to your fellow Christian – face to foot. If your brother is standing on your doorstep, having spent months without a toothbrush, weeks without a bath, days walking about on dirt paths in sandals, how close are you willing to get? And what I mean is, when you find a fellow Christian who just doesn't smell the way you expect a Christian to smell, or

look the way you expect a Christian to look, or act the way you expect a Christian to act – when that Christian comes into your personal space in need of help what will you do? Or what will you do when you find that you are the one who needs your socks put on, when you are the one who needs help, will you trust your fellow Christians to help you put your socks on your footies? By this they will know.

“For we though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”

The Lord’s Supper is about growing closer and closer to Christ and to each other in Christ. There is no closer bond to Christ than this and there is no closer bond to one another either. For in this fellowship you have entered the personal space of Christ’s body and blood together.

And there will be things that happen that no perfume can cover up. This means, as in any close relationship, there will be things said and done that we would never expect a Christian to say or do – there will be things that hurt ... but so also will there be a way of healing. “As I have loved you, so you love one another.”

There are no boundaries here. There can be no divisions or offenses here. There can be no sins or offenses or differing beliefs or grudges or anger or embarrassment that divide us. Rather here we personally join in repentance, forgiveness, and kneel down at Table together. For all who enter this personal space this evening are one body, united in Christ. “For we though many, are one bread and one body.”

Its time to overcome the culture shock of Christ. To get a little closer. To let others get a little closer – into conversations, into homes, into lives. Its time to let our fellow Christians into our personal space and be willing to ask them to put socks on our footies. For these crises are the opportunities God gives us to show to all the world that we are His disciples; to love just as he loved us – more than a wave or a handshake – its a time to welcome that wanderer who has spent months without a toothbrush, weeks without a bath, days walking about on dirt paths in sandals, and enter this personal space of Christ together. And blessed are you if you do this. Amen.