

**Wesley United Methodist Church**

April 17, 2014

"Maundy Thursday"

"I Heard a Rooster Crow."

John 13:1-17

Dr. Fred Craddock tells a story about something that happened many years ago while he was driving cross-country. He had stopped at a small diner somewhere in the South to refresh himself with an early breakfast and some coffee. He had been driving through the night and now it was getting close to dawn. He was sleepy.

As he waited for his breakfast order to come, A black man came in and sat down on a stool up by the lunch counter. The diner's manager then began to treat the black man with contempt that was clearly borne of deep-seated racism. The manager was rude, insulting, demeaning, toward his black guest. As he sat in his booth a little ways away from the counter, Craddock wrestled with whether to say something to this manager for his shameful racist conduct.

Meanwhile the black man quickly slurped down some coffee and fled into the darkness. Craddock remained silent. "I didn't say anything," he confessed. "I quickly paid my bill, left the diner, and headed back to my car. but as I walked through the parking lot, somewhere in the distance, I heard a rooster crow."

You and I know about that business with the rooster, don't we? The story's told in chapter 13 of John's Gospel and again in chapter 18. Simon Peter hears a rooster crow and he remembers Christ's words, "I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" And Simon Peter wept.

Nothing that happened that evening had gone as Simon Peter expected. It was just before the Passover Feast. The disciples had gathered with their Master for a meal. They did not know it would be the last meal they would share before his crucifixion.

Suddenly, without warning the Master got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around his waist. He came to Simon Peter. Simon expressed bewilderment. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," Peter protested, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied with his customary bravado, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well."

That was typical Simon Peter-speak. Later in the evening Jesus announced that one of them would betray him. Judas fled from the room. Then Jesus said to them, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

"A new command I give to you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." That's so Simon Peter alright. It was then that Jesus gave his sad prophecy, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

Simon Peter. No one experienced more of the ups and downs of being a disciple of Jesus Christ than Simon Peter. It was he of whom Jesus said, "On this rock I will build my

church...(Mt 16:18) Yet it was he who denied the Master. This night and the week that followed would change Simon Peter forever.

I wonder if Simon Peter grasped the full significance of what was happening when Christ began washing the feet of his disciples. In no other religion could such an event even be imagined.

The writer of Philippians would try to do justice to the event: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very same nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

God with a towel around his waist. God with a basin of water kneeling in front of humble fishermen, tax collectors and other common ordinary folk. God doing the work of a servant. God washing feet.

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Does this mean we should have regular foot-washing ceremonies? It can be a powerful experience. But that is not the real focus of Christ's teaching. The real focus is that we should be another's servants. This is Christ's will for us. That we should love one another and serve one another as he served us.

Simon Peter did not always say the right thing, or do the right thing. But he took up Christ's cross, the cross of servant-hood. As we break the bread and take the cup in remembrance of Christ, we remember how he humbled himself and became a servant... Let us do likewise.