

**March 24, 2016 - Maundy Thursday**  
**John 13:1-17, 31b-35**  
**The Rev. Carenda Baker**

WELCOME, dear ones!

We are gathered once again here in precious HOLY SPACE. HOLY SPACE, IN HOLY TIME, TO STAND AGAIN ON HOLY GROUND. We have gathered here as the Trinity part of God's family, to enter again into the HOLY MYSTERY of God's love, lavishly and completely poured out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

All the Scripture readings for tonight tell us that this is GOD'S STORY, the CRUX [+], the center of the Christian faith. It is our story. I encourage you, in the next 3 days, to enter into this story with as much of your mind, body, heart and spirit as you can offer, because THIS STORY WILL CHANGE YOU, YOU KNOW. Tonight we are invited to let the Spirit move and empty us: empty us of pride and independence. Empty us of any pretension and insistence on mapping things out to suit ourselves and meet our own needs. We are invited tonight to be emptied so that we have room to receive more – oh, so much more – of the abundant life God wants for each of us, for our families, for this parish, and the world. It is a gentle and powerful invitation we have been given. I am glad you have come.

Tonight, Good Friday and Holy Saturday will point us toward 2 things: THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIP AND THE POWER OF LOVE. Let me say just a bit more about these lynchpins of life, beginning with LOVE.

One of the favorite tools from my toolbox as a family and couples therapist is a book called, "THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES. The author, psychologist Gary Chapman, suggests that there are basically 5 ways that human beings can be shown love. He believes that each of us desires, and has a distinct preference for a way to be shown love. He calls these ways of showing love, the 5 LOVE LANGUAGES.

**LOVE LANGUAGE 1: POSITIVE AND AFFIRMING WORDS.** This language runs the gamut from terms of endearment like "sweetheart", "honey," "dear", or "my love", to playful nicknames – to simple and profound statements like: I love you; thank you; I am proud of you; You are precious to me; I cherish you; I am sorry; Forgive me; I forgive you. You get the picture. These words can be spoken or written or sung or recorded, included in letters, tucked in lunch boxes, stuck on the fridge, or left in notes on a pillow.

**LOVE LANGUAGE 2: PHYSICAL AFFECTION.** This language runs the wide gamut from the simplicity of holding a hand, to being held and cuddled, to high fives, pats on the back, a squeeze of the shoulder, to hugs, kisses, caresses and our deepest and most intimate ways of sharing physical love in lovemaking. Human beings were created by God for connection. The language of physical affection is profound and powerful and good.

**LOVE LANGUAGE 3: QUALITY TIME.** Most of us are fairly well acquainted with this love language. It is time spent together, intentionally being present to one another. This love language is limited only by our own creativity, because we can enjoy quality time doing just about anything, anywhere – chores, sharing a cup of coffee or a meal, watching a movie, chatting, driving, walking, or taking a trip or vacation.

**LOVE LANGUAGE 4: GIFTS.** These are the tangible material things that are signs of our love; they point to love. Think Christmas, but not necessarily in any extravagant form. Simple is always good. Those simple handmade gifts of the heart are often the best and most precious to us.

**LOVE LANGUAGE 5: ACTS OF SERVICE.** These are the unselfish deeds that demonstrate our love and care; they are LOVE IN ACTION. We know these well, and sadly, often take them for granted. Packing lunches. Cooking meals. Doing laundry and washing the dishes. Changing the oil in the car. Changing diapers. Paying the bills. Cleaning up after messes of one sort or another. You get the idea.

All 5 of these LOVE LANGUAGES HAVE GOD AS THEIR SOURCE, GIVER OF ALL GOOD GIFTS, OUR CREATOR, BLESS-ED, ULTIMATE AND HOLY LOVER.

Now interestingly enough, all 5 of these love languages show up in the account of Jesus' last supper with his disciples. And why not? Tonight is about Jesus' gentle invitation to us, to enter into deeper relationship with him, and with those closest to us, those with whom we share our homes, our friends, this church family, our neighbors.

Unlike the other 3 gospels, the focal point in the Gospel of John on this Holy Thursday is not the meal, but *the primary love language* Jesus shows during the meal, the ACT OF SERVICE HE PERFORMS when he takes off his robe and picks up the pitcher, basin and towel to wash the disciples' feet. Usually this would have been done before the meal started, but in John's story, Jesus gets up in the middle of supper to take on this menial task, one usually given to slaves or servants in households wealthy enough to have them.

So, try to picture John's scene in your mind's eye: You've been talking, sharing tasty and savory foods and good conversation, and all at once, Jesus interrupts it, beginning to make his way around the table moving from disciple to disciple. He goes to Andrew, on to James and John. Then to Philip and Thomas and Judas. Close your eyes for just a moment and imagine what it is like as Jesus kneels before you. Your eyes meet his. His face and eyes are full of warmth and love. He smiles, says your name, adding something like "my dear friend, my beloved. I am so glad you're here with me tonight". His touch is firm and yet gentle as he lifts first one foot, then the other over the basin and pours water over your foot, massaging it gently to loosen the caked-on dirt and grime of the day, then dries your feet with a towel. How refreshing it feels! [Pause] There are few things in life more intimate and holy than allowing yourself to be washed by another, whether you are child, parent, a beloved partner or a friend. It is a gift you know, to the person who loves you, to allow yourself to be washed.

Well, Jesus has now made his way around to Peter. Peter has been silent up until the point that the Lord kneels before him. Well, Peter quickly registers his resistance, and probably spoke what all the others were feeling but weren't saying. **"LORD, ARE YOU GOING TO WASH MY FEET?"** This isn't YOUR job, Lord. It's beneath who you are as our Teacher and Master. Frankly, it's too lowly, too dirty a job for you." **"YOU WILL NEVER WASH MY FEET."**

I get Peter's reaction, don't you? It goes against every strong, independent and willful part of Peter's being, to be so vulnerable before the Lord, the One who kneels in front of him. Jesus' response to Peter is short and bracing. **"IF I DO NOT WASH YOU, YOU CAN HAVE NO SHARE WITH ME."**

I think Jesus means several things by that statement. "Unless I wash you Peter, you cannot experience true loving union with me like I have with the Father, which we want to share with you."

"Unless I wash you Peter, you won't understand that you will not be able to live out the command to love as I have loved you. This love is my legacy to you. You need this, because I will soon be gone from you."

Friends, the text brings us, like Peter, to a crossroads, a point of decision. **"YOU WILL NEVER WASH MY FEET"** is an attempt to stay away, to keep a distance, to insist on our lack of need, and to assert our strength to carry on without Jesus our Teacher, our Savior, the Suffering Servant coming close and touching us. **"IF YOU DON'T LET ME WASH YOU, YOU CAN HAVE NO SHARE WITH ME."** Peter, if you won't let me serve and love you in this way, you will miss experiencing what life in relationship with me is all about. The words are not just for Peter. Can you hear Jesus addressing us? "Oh beloved, I want you to let me love you. I love you so much. Just let me show you how much."

Here's the rub for us friends: It really is so much easier and comfortable for us to be the giver rather than the receiver of love. When we give we get to be in charge. But when we receive the love of another – it requires letting go of control and extending open hands and hearts, in vulnerability and trust - to accept the gift being offered. Jesus wants to do this for each of us. Jesus waits patiently for us, until we are able to let him – by serving us, love us. And that love will definitely change us.

The discomfort we feel in foot washing is precisely what Jesus calls us to offer up daily: our discomfort with baring our need, and exposing ourselves to the needs of others. Tonight offers us an opportunity to move through the discomfort of being served, so that authentic servant hearts can be more deeply shaped in us. Here in foot washing and then as we commune at the Lord's table, as we take Jesus' life into ourselves, we will become Jesus' eyes and hands and face and heart to others. It doesn't get any more real or intimate than in our receiving – in these embodied and spiritual acts – the love of God in Christ that we are then to give away to others.

After the foot washing, we will be reminded of Jesus' command to love one another. In the gospel reading, that command comes only AFTER the foot washing has been completed. There is no one whose feet Jesus has not washed. Judas doesn't leave until after the foot washing. Truth be told, 11 of the 12 disciples, all but John, will leave Jesus' alone in the end – caught in their own confusion, fear, disillusionment, denial and betrayal. In their brokenness, sin, and self-sufficiency, they will eventually give up on their relationship with Jesus. But Jesus does not give up on them, or us. He loves them, and us, to the end.

I hope yours has been a holy and meaningful Lent, and that you have known moments of deepening relationship with God. This Lent, the Holy Spirit has been leading me to look at the ways I, so much like Peter, resist God's love. For me, I resist God's love and help by trying to be a perfectionist, wanting to be in control of all outcomes; by listening too often to the false words of the Adversary who would have me believe I am not good enough, am not enough as a created human being for God to love; by being prone to wander from what God desires by getting caught up in people-pleasing and placating others.

So, I say it again - tonight is about LOVE and about RELATIONSHIP, with our Lord, and with each other. For Jesus' disciples, this was a night of at first renewed, then sorely tested, and seemingly broken intimate relationships. The foundation that will undergird all that happens to Jesus, and to us as we follow him, is LOVE. Love that bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I invite you to join me, and open yourself once again to receive God's immeasurable love poured out in the life of the dearly beloved Son. I don't begin to understand this love rationally, but I have experienced it, and I yearn with all my heart to be enveloped in it, so that I might learn from my Lord how to share such a love with others. The Lord graciously calls and invites. Together, friends, let us follow, wait, and watch, to see what the power of God's LOVE intends to do in us, and for us and the whole world, once again. Amen.