

Love One Another

[John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#)

It's a puzzling thing.

Jesus lived a in a time that could not have begun to conceive of what we are doing tonight – gathering for virtual worship – and he could not have conceived of a world where people stayed in their own homes. Without that physical connection, how are we to follow his direction, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”?

We have gathered together this evening to commemorate the last supper – the last time Jesus had supper with his disciples. Or at least, the last time they had supper with the Jesus they knew. Because we know that they at least had one breakfast with him again, if not supper. After his resurrection, he met them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and cooked fish for them when they returned from a night of fishing.

But that was after, after the resurrection. Tonight we remember the last supper before it all happened, before the unthinkable.

And we are living in the unthinkable. If you had told me six months ago that we would be spending Holy Week sheltered at home, remembering the disciples gathered with Jesus but being unable to gather ourselves, I would not have believed you. The unthinkable has happened and we do not know where it will lead us.

I have more than usual empathy for the disciples hearing Jesus' words, “You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, `Where I am going, you cannot come.” How that must have chilled their hearts. Just as listening to the news chills our hearts today.

The gospel reading we heard tonight was the very beginning of a long section of John's gospel where Jesus gives detailed if sometimes confusing instruction to his disciples, and by extension to us. It is in this farewell discourse that he tells us that he is the true vine and that we, the branches, are to abide in him. But much of his focus is on the importance of love and of how we are connected to him and he is connected to the Creator.

And so he starts it all with this symbolic act where he takes off his outer robe and dons a towel like a servant before washing the disciples' feet. This he tells us is how we are to love one another. This is what to means to be a follower of Jesus, to be the servant of others in a mutual dance of caring and being cared for.

I am sure there are many of you who are grateful not to be meeting in person tonight for it means that you don't have to deal with the dilemma of foot-washing. You don't like the idea of having your feet washed, even at a distance of six feet. You have probably never done it and you are grateful that tonight you are not going to be challenged. Like Peter you would much rather wash someone else's feet than have your own washed.

But the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is both mutual and power sharing. That is how we are to love one another.

Let's start with power-sharing. In every relationship there is a dance of power. For example, I have a lot of institutional power as the Rector of this church and sometimes when I am expressing a personal opinion it is heard as me making a decision or stating a policy. So I try to wait for others to express their ideas and feelings first. Most power difference is a lot more subtle – it can come from experience or knowledge or from having the loudest voice, or being the most likely to get upset. It also

comes from privilege – being better educated, more white, having English as a first language, having more money and so on.

Jesus had the power that came from being the healer, teacher, the Rabbi, the Lord, the Son of God, the Messiah. It was common for people to serve Jesus, but tonight, in this dramatic act, he turns the tables of power and he serves the disciples. The Lord serves the servants. And they let him.

So I think this is a good time for us to ponder where we have privilege and power and how we use it, for good or not so good, and when it is loving to let that power go and stand before another who has less power, with our towel and wash basin, ready to serve. I think this may be a guide for us within the church community whenever there is a conflict of need, that those with the greater power and the greater privilege give way to those with less.

But let's get back to Peter for a moment. He doesn't want his feet washed. He doesn't want to be served. Isn't this a kind of pride to think that somehow we are special, that somehow we don't need to be helped. My friends, this is not a time for false notions of pride or self-sufficiency. You can get away without having your feet washed this year, but if you need groceries, if you need emotional and spiritual support, if you need to vent, pick up the phone. Use your cloister group. Call a trusted friend. Call me. Do not wait until you are feeling desperate and cannot go on or until you have no fresh food and are poking around the stuff at the back of the freezer which is unidentifiable because it's so covered in freezer burn..

A few minutes ago, I said the love that Jesus was talking about was both mutual and power-sharing. Once you are able to see and to subvert the

relationships of power, once you are able to receive as well as to give, then love becomes mutual.

Mutual love is the basis of the life of the Trinity. The three persons of the Trinity live together in a dance of mutual love. This is not only our example but also the true expression of God living within and through us. It is actually at the core of who we are, and who we are called to be as Christ-like beings.

So this is how we are to love even when we cannot meet. We are to continue to build relationship with one another using every means at our disposal, prayer, Zoom, Facebook, the phone. We are the Body of Christ, our relationship is not one which can be seen but a mystical participation in the life of the Christ. That is not stopped by the social isolation of sheltering at home. The Jesus we know is the one who showed up from nowhere and cooked the fish on the shore, the resurrected Christ who is not limited by time and space.

and our love is not limited either. We are gathered together to share in the Lord's supper and as we do so we remember that night, millennia ago, when the unthinkable happened. And we remember Jesus' love.