

Thursday– April 21, 2011 (Maundy)
Pastor - Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **Awash in Love**

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Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

When Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, he takes on the role of the servant. In his day, if a guest came into someone's home, the host would often have a servant wash the guest's feet. A man who had walked some distance to visit would have feet that were dirty and tired. Sandals did not provide much protection from the grime of the road or the beating his feet would have taken along the way.

So, when Jesus wraps the towel around himself, he is the host who decides his guests need their feet washed, and he is the servant who does the washing.

In washing, Jesus is acting out his word - Be a loving servant to all. Have you ever been to a Hard Rock Café? The motto they have all over the building, their t-shirts, lapel pins and everything else they sell is "Love All. Serve All." I don't know where they got that motto from, but Jesus said it first. And he lived it.

He is living it in our Gospel lesson. He is hoping his disciples will understand that the important thing in the foot-washing is not the water. It is the relationship with Jesus. If they accept his gesture of hospitality, they are "clean." Judas got his feet washed, but was not "clean," because he rejected the relationship, the union with Christ.

After Judas leaves, Jesus explains to his disciples that God has been glorified in their actions this evening. And he gives them "a new commandment." The commandment to love doesn't sound very new. When Jesus put the two commands to love together in the Great Commandment, he drew them from the Torah, the ancient Law of the Jews. What is new is that the love they are to show one another has been exemplified by Jesus Christ in his love for them. The love he expects them to have comes from God through Christ into our hearts.

Jesus states here that love is the mark of the Christian. Love is not just part

of being a Christian. It is the foundation of the Christian life. It permeates every aspect of our lives, if we allow and encourage it.

Clearly, this love is not to be limited to people we find easy to love. Anybody can love lovable people. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this (Matthew 5:46-48).

The mark of the true Christian, one who has welcomed the love of God through Jesus Christ deeply into his/her life, is the divinely-inspired and divinely-empowered love for every single human being, as well as for all of Creation.

To the extent that we fail to love -

 when we judge,

 when we seek revenge for some slight, real or imagined,

 when we think less of people who are not just like us,

we fail to be Christian.

We fail to be children of God.

We fail to be brothers and sisters of the Son of God.

We give people who are already opposed to the Church more ammunition.

We give aid and comfort to the Enemy.

We dim the divine Light and beckon the darkness to come in and be our god.

We take the hallmark of discipleship and say,

“I’ll do it when it’s convenient.”

“I’ll do it when it’s easy.”

“I’ll love the people who deserve it. Everyone else is on their own.”

When the Church embodies Jesus’ love, and ONLY when the Church embodies Jesus’ love, it reveals him to the world. But, it starts right here, in the Body of Christ. This commandment demands that we grit our teeth, gird our loins, and try as hard as we can to love the people in this fellowship who make our skin crawl. In addition to putting in supreme effort, we must also pray as if it were entirely up to God. We can love the unlovable only with God’s help.

Once we have glorified God by loving everyone in our fellowship, we can focus on loving the guests who find us and want to see what it’s like to worship with us. Each one of them needs to go home knowing that we love them.

Then, we turn our faces outward, and with grit and determination grown and nurtured in the crucible of loving one another, and with the love of God burning in our bones, we go out and love the living daylights out of Fredericksburg, and all of Virginia, and the entire US, and the whole world. Only with God fueling us with his divine power do we have any chance at all of succeeding in this sacred mission. But, succeed we must, because -for us and for the whole world - the alternative is simply too horrible to contemplate.