

gift of one's life is to model one's love on a love that has not limits, that knows no boundaries or restrictions. To interpret Jesus' death as the ultimate act of love enables the believer to see that the love to which Jesus summons the community is not the giving *up* of one's life, but the giving *away* of one's life. This distinction is important, because the love that Jesus embodies is grace, not sacrifice... Jesus did not deny himself; he lived his identity and vocation fully. To love one another as Jesus loves us is to live a life thoroughly shaped by a love that knows no limits, by a love whose expression brings the believer closer into relationship with God, with Jesus, and with one another."

Forgive one another, accept one another as children of God, and love one another and our neighbors.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church- Lynchburg, VA

April 18, 2019

"Forgive, Accept, Love!"

Exodus 12:1-14

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Is there anyone who has not shared a meal, said good-bye, or suffered a loss? This is the human condition, the human experience where we find ourselves on this holy Thursday. We have all shared a meal and will share communion later this evening. We have all had to say good-bye to someone we love,... in the short term, or more eternally. We have all suffered loss. This evening, we recall the events on that first Last Supper, where Jesus shared a meal with his disciples, and they said good-bye, and they grappled with and anticipated his loss. They did not fully understand it then but were told they would understand later.

How do we, gathered here, respond to this holy word? What do we make of this ancient text and how does it apply to our life today? I submit to you that the response to this human experience should be three-fold. In John 13, we see hospitable forgiveness, acceptance, and of course, love. May tonight serve to remind us to forgive one another, accept one another as children of God, and love one another and our neighbors.

Hospitable Forgiveness

Jesus taught and modeled radical grace- "foot washing was a way of welcoming one's guests; a person's feet would become dusty during the journey, and the host offered water so that guests could wash their feet. The foot washing was normally performed by the guest themselves, or by servants at the behest of the host, so that foot washing as service is closely linked with foot washing as hospitality. When Jesus washes his disciples' feet, he combines the roles of servant and host."¹

Leonora Tisdale writes, "Suppose some of us are having a hard time forgiving ourselves for something we have done, a difficult time accepting the radical grace of Jesus. Then perhaps we turn our attention toward the people who are gathered at the table with Jesus that night: Judas, who knows he will betray him; Peter, who will deny him; James and John, who will be unable to keep watch and pray with him; and the others who will forsake him in his hour of darkest need. We watch in wonder as Jesus' response to this inner circle that has disappointed him over and over and over again is not to chastise or scold or punish, but to take a towel and a basin of water and gently to wash the ugliness of each one in turn. We will remember that the Communion table is a place where we can come- time and time again- to have our own ugliness lovingly touched and washed clean by Jesus."² This is radical grace. This is hospitality. This is true forgiveness. To forgive and love as we have been forgiven. **"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."**

¹ New Interpreter's Bible, Vol IX, Abingdon press, pg. 722

² Feasting on the Word, pg. 279 Year C, Vol 2, WJK Press

“There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father. On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.”³ I suspect we all need forgiveness and love from someone and should offer it to someone.

Acceptance

What does it mean to accept or have acceptance, it's defined as- the action of consenting to receive or undertake something offered? Why do we have trouble accepting gifts or even help?

What about when we accept Jesus Christ? Then we allow Jesus to bathe us, to clean us, in baptism, in his life and death. That can be hard, death, yes, but also hard to accept the gift. To accept simple acts of service. If I tried to wash your feet right now it may feel awkward and embarrassing, for one or both of us. I bet if I tried to bring you a meal, you may respectfully decline (granted if you've ever tried my cooking, you would have good reason to decline...). Why is that? We aren't here to compare ourselves with one another in a holy race, and we aren't here to lord righteousness over one another or argue about who is the greatest. We are here to “wash one another's feet” and to accept that gift when offered by others. *What would washing feet look like for our day and age? If it is to clean up after a journey, would that mean washing someone's car? I think not. If it's hospitality, what does that look like here and now?* The point is we need to accept the gift. As Jesus told Peter, unless I wash your feet, you have no share with me.

What does it mean to have a “share” in Jesus?

To have a “share” with Jesus is to have fellowship with him, to participate fully in his life.

“If one removes oneself from this act, then one removes oneself from Jesus and the promises of God. To have Jesus wash one's feet is to receive from Jesus an act of hospitality that decisively alters one's relationship to Jesus and, through Jesus, to God.”⁴

Tonight is a reminder to accept the gift Christ freely offers and live faithfully in response. “The connection seems clear: love is laying down our lives for one another; foot washing is one of those small, everyday acts of humble service; and both of these reveal us to be the disciples of Jesus.”⁵

“When the faith community embodies Jesus' love, it not only reveals his identity, but it also assumes a new identity for itself, shaped by Jesus' identity. The references to the betrayal that are woven into the foot washing narrative sound a cautionary note about this new identity. Jesus' act toward us in love present the community with a choice: One can embrace Jesus' gift to us and embody one's embrace of that gift through one's own acts of love, or one can turn one's back on Jesus' gift of love. We can enter community with Jesus and with one another, or we can reject that community.”⁶ We can only love others and follow Jesus' example, when we have accepted and received Christ's love and experienced that love ourselves.

³ *Bits & Pieces*, October 15, 1992, pp. 13.

⁴ New Interpreter's Bible, Vol IX, Abingdon Press, pg. 723

⁵ Feasting on the Word, Year C Vol. 2, WJK Press, pg. 278

Finally, there is the small matter of love

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

It is natural to love them that love us, but it is supernatural to love them that hate us.

In his book Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor... act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."

Let's talk about what love is and what love is not. Paul tells us **“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

Elsewhere in Scripture, 1 John 4 reads, **“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”**

In a blog, David Cain helped me understand what love is not. “Love is not what the movies and hit songs tell us it is. Love doesn't hurt. If it hurts it's something else. Fear. Attachment. Idolatry. Addiction. Possessiveness.

Nobody's heart aches out of love. In pop culture, love gets conflated with desire all the time. From childhood we learn you can like something, or you can *love* it, as if it's only different degrees of the same thing.

A lot of us grow up thinking that to love is simply to want very badly. It's hard to be sensitive to love when you're overrun by desire. Love isn't something that can be done *badly*, if it's love at all. Desire can happen at the same time as love, but it's not the same thing. Jealousy isn't love, nor is it evidence of love. Jealousy is fear. Love doesn't drive people mad, it drives them sane. Desire, in its different forms, can drive people to do anything. Love never drives people to kill or steal or cheat or worry. Defining it is impossible.

(Finally), You can throw words at it but never pin it down. Nothing is misidentified more often than love. But for now, we can know what it's not. If it hurts, it's not love.”⁷

“Jesus' teaching on love and discipleship are unrelentingly placed in the context of his betrayal and death in John 13. To model one's love on a love whose ultimate expressions is the

⁶ New Interpreter's Bible, Vol IX, Abingdon Press, pg. 728

⁷ <https://www.raptitude.com/2012/11/what-love-is-not/>