

## Are You Willing to be Loved this Much?

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek  
 Maundy Thursday † 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35  
 St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Ventura, California  
 March 29, 2018

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*With the hands that formed the earth,  
 You washed our feet.  
 Kneeling down, you laid aside your majesty.  
 And you said for us to go and do the same.  
 So, we serve for the glory of your name.*

These are lyrics from the song, King of Love by Stephen Curtis Chapman. I find the truth in them so moving!

With the hands that formed the earth, he washed their feet. How can that be? Have you ever known a love this strong, this powerful, this vulnerable, this beautiful?

He could do anything. Angels watched over him. He could speak things into being, heal, cast out evil, multiply fish and bread and feed a multitude with hardly any effort at all. And what does he ask of his disciples? Come, let me wash your feet.

*With the hands that formed the earth,  
 He washed their feet.  
 Kneeling down, he laid aside his majesty.  
 And you said for them to go and do the same.  
 So, they served for the glory of his name.*

Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and they are taken aback. When we think about it, we are too. "No Lord. I can't let you do this." Our minds run and our emotions churn as we consider allowing our clergy to wash our feet. Imagine what it would be to like to have Jesus, himself, kneel down before us!

Why would he do this? To show the depth of love he has for us, and to show how we are all called to serve one another.

If Christ, himself, can wash the dust off our feet, no one can consider themselves above this calling. We are all called to accept a deep and amazing love, and to serve the world with that love.

Called to serve. That's ok with me. I can accept that. For it is better to give than to receive. But called to allow Christ to kneel down and serve me, that's what gets me all tangled up inside.

How about you? Are you willing to be loved that much?

All we have and all we are, are gifts from God. Along with all the wonderful blessings we have received, we also find that we are quite skilled at being selfish, arrogant, critical of others. We

judge, we hurt, we watch out for ourselves and sometimes step over those who are in need or have less than we do. Yet, Jesus calls us to let him love us; to allow him to bow down before us, to wash away that which we may not even realize is there.

He even washes the feet of Judas who he knows will soon betray him. And if Jesus can love Judas that much, and if Jesus can forgive Judas, he can certainly love and forgive us.

Still the question remains, can we allow ourselves to be loved this much?

Today is Maundy Thursday. Maundy means “mandate.” It is the night on which Jesus gives a new mandate, a new commandment.

*“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is a commandment not just to love, but to love like Jesus did. To be willing to humble ourselves and even to wash each other’s feet. We are called to suppress our human desire to be first, to be better, smarter, wealthier, better looking, and higher achieving. Called to control our competitive nature and, instead, offer to the world the love of a servant.

Jesus loves, serves and sacrifices all - not on behalf of those who deserve it most, but on behalf of those who need it most. This a powerful kind of love, a love that surpasses all human understanding. And this is the love Jesus calls us to receive so that we, ourselves, can give it.

Tonight, we remember the Last Supper; when Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, “take, eat. This is my body...” In words we still use today, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and, for the first time, used bread as his body and wine as his blood. Then he shared the bread and the wine, and told them, “Do this for the remembrance of me.”

So, that’s what we’re doing here this evening. We are here to remember, to allow ourselves to be loved this much, and share the bread and the wine made holy.

When the Eucharist is over, we will strip the altar and remember the time when Jesus was arrested, tried, stripped, beaten, and convicted. We’ll remove everything holy from the sanctuary, and anything that remains will be veiled in black. Then we’ll enter a time of deep darkness.

The one bit of hope left will be in ciborium where a few pieces of bread, the consecrated body of Christ, will remain. It will be set on the chapel altar and we will take turns keeping the watch through the night at the Vigil at the Altar of Repose. Taking shifts throughout the night we will do what Jesus asked, we will stay, watch and pray.

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<sup>1</sup> John 13:

Tomorrow at noon we will complete the vigil and remember the crucifixion. The final wafers will be consumed, and nothing will remain. At 3pm, the church bells will ring, and the doors will be locked.

For a time, it will seem that the world has won. God is dead. Hope is gone. But wait, watch and pray. It makes no sense to the world but believe anyway. And pray, "Lord help my unbelief."

Through the next few days we will wait, watch and remember. But first we need to allow ourselves to be loved more than we ever thought was possible. Why? Because once we are filled with that much love, it will overflow, and we will become capable of loving others that much.

This is something we will be able to do for everyone; Saints, sinners, washed, unwashed, worthy, unworthy; it won't matter. Overflowing with love, we will serve one another, and the world will look at us and wonder how we can manage it.

It is through Christ that we can do these things. Through Christ we will love when others would hate, when others would turn away, when others would take advantage, when others would never understand why. And we will do it because, on this night, when offered this much love, we were willing to accept it.

*With the hands that formed the earth,  
He wants to wash your feet.  
For your sake, he kneels down, setting aside his majesty.  
And he calls for you to go and do the same.  
Come join us as we serve for the glory of his name.*

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



The Rev. Susan Bek serves as the Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Ventura. She is a motivated and spirit-filled priest who loves her work serving God in Christ and spreading hope and Good News in the world. She lives in Ventura with her husband, Jon. They have four children and four grandchildren. Her passions include preaching, teaching, children's ministries, music, graphic design and wildlife photography. She is proficient in both English and American Sign Language (ASL) and incorporates sign language every time she celebrates the Eucharist. She does this to show that we are committed to welcoming all, even if that means we need to change in order to become more accessible.



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Sunday Services: 8am & 10:15am

Sunday School and Youth Group meet Sundays at 10am

Wednesday Healing Service with Eucharist: 9am

*We follow Jesus, nurture ministries and welcome all.*