

Maundy Thursday, 2011

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

Title: Love

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What is love?

Love is more than an emotion. Love is more than a feeling, although it often starts there. Love is more than words. Love is an action. Love is something you do.

And in the case of Jesus, love is a person.

Every action of Jesus was an act of love. Everything Jesus did was His way of loving the world.

His Incarnation was an act of love. Love came down at Christmas, and love was born to walk amongst us.

Love showed His character by the gifts He gave- giving wine at the wedding, stilling the storm for His disciples, casting out demons, healing the sick, the lame, the blind, even raising the dead, casting out demons, and forgiving sins- every one an act of love.

Every word that Jesus spoke was a word of love. His comforting words of promise and hope, even His harsh words of warning and rebuke were spoken out of love.

Every act, every word, everything- love.

Jesus doesn't just love a little bit, or just at certain times when He felt like it. Jesus didn't just love when it was easy or until He got tired.

Jesus loved all the way until the end. Jesus never stopped loving. He never stops loving you.

Our gospel lesson begins with these words, "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

Jesus loves you to the end, to the completion, to the telos. From the moment He was born until the moment he cried out "It is finished," Jesus loved you. Everything Jesus did was out of love for you.

You are the object of Jesus' love. You the one who is His own in the world. You belong to Jesus, and He loves you.

Tonight there is one thing in particular that Jesus does to show His love. There are many more, of course, but let's just ponder this one- Jesus washes His disciples' feet.

Jesus loved His disciples, even their dirty, stinky feet. There wasn't one inch of their bodies that He didn't love.

And so He did what only the lowliest servant would do. He took off His outer garment, wrapped a towel around His waist, and washed His disciples' feet.

Love does the dirty, menial, tasks. Love washes the dishes and changes diapers. Love wipes noses and mows the grass. Love shares a meal or a ride. Love sits for hours in a hospital room.

Love does not assert right or privilege. Love doesn't say, "I'm too good for that." Love doesn't say, "That's beneath me."

Love sees needs- dirty feet, lonely eyes, empty hands and asks, "How can I serve? What can I do?"

Love offers more than just thoughts or words. Love takes action. Love gets involved, even if it means getting dirty.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.

When love acts, it starts an avalanche, a cascade of more love. Jesus loves His disciples so that they might love one another. Jesus washes His disciples' feet so that they might wash each other's feet.

You learn to love by first being loved yourself. You learned to love by the way that your family and your friends loved you. And you have used their examples to love others.

Ultimately, love comes from God. God is love. We love because He first loved us.

God has used all these people in your life to show you His love, and now He will use you to show His love to others. Your love is God's love.

The world will recognize you by this love. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The world can recognize a fake. Words are not good enough for the world. If you talk about love but never act on it, the world will call you a hypocrite. It doesn't matter how many crosses you wear or bumper stickers you put on your car, if don't love, you aren't like Jesus.

Jesus says, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

It's heavy responsibility, and we fail miserably. Our actions are often the complete opposite of love. We know what we should do, but we don't do it.

And so our service began this evening with confession, absolution and peace. You received forgiveness from God for being unloving. God loved you.

And then you forgave one another with words of peace. You loved one another.

This is the most loving thing you can do to serve one another- forgive and grant peace.

This kind of love comes only from God. Only God can forgive sins. But as you are loved and forgiven, so you will now love and forgive one another.

Since we have been forgiven, we now join together to share and celebrate this love here at the altar. We come to taste love broken, poured out, given and shed for us.

Love incarnate is here with us, to fill us with His love to the point of overflowing, so that His love flows out, through you to the people in this place and out in the unloving world.

Jesus loved His disciples, He loved you to the very end. Tonight we see love in action in the upper room. Tomorrow we will see how far Jesus' love will take Him.