

By Our Love
John 13.31-35
Maundy Thursday
[April 2, 2015]
adapted for April 13, 2017
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There are a lot of things I love. I love a Sunday afternoon, about 78 degrees with very little humidity and windows that will open wide to let the breeze move around and blow away our hiddenness and our cobwebs. I love a nice, long meal with maybe half a dozen friends and a big, round table; a meal that takes its time over many courses with food that makes you want to lick the plate and spoon and whatever is left, the kind that feeds from a story in each dish.

I love my husband and my children in a way that takes my breath away and sometimes makes it hard to speak above a whisper. I love a day in the sunshine and the dirt planting herbs and veggies and flowers and a few hopeful seeds that may or may not turn into anything. I love neighbors who talk to each other in their front yards and across their front porches.

I love the sound of gentle Gulf waves as it's time to fall asleep. I love the sound of the streetcar as it passes by in the midst of our worship. I love the sound of children giggling because they've discovered in some small way that life is wonderful and hilarious and amazing. I love the sound of a quiet sanctuary on a Thursday night when the saints have gathered to remember and reflect and hold some space together for a while. And I love the saints who make the space sacred with their bodies and their best intentions.

There are a lot of things I love.

On this Maundy Thursday, I am aware of how much I love the church. I love that we step in and out of our daily lives and choose to come together here. I love that families can find a place here, side-by-side, and raise their children in this community together. I love that we can tell the truth about our lives here. I love that God uses church to gather all of our brokenness and put it in one big pot to replace the loneliness with togetherness and the lostness with some foundness.

On this Maundy Thursday, I'm aware of how much I love Jesus for sitting with his friends that night and lending them his courage in bread and wine. I love him for not giving up on them even though they misunderstood him or misunderstood their call to follow as a call to power. I love him for wanting so dearly for them to get it right. I'm aware of how much I love him for telling us that the way people will know we are following him is by the ways of love.

And in that same breath, I am afraid. I am afraid that we in the church have forgotten the we are commanded to love each other. We know we are supposed to love the Lord our

God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind just like we know we are supposed to love our neighbor as ourself. But we in the church are now known for a whole, long list of other things besides the way we love. And we are rarely known for disagreeing in loving ways. I am afraid we have forgotten that we ARE loved, that we are loveable, that we are worthy of not just the big, deep, wide love of Jesus but the big, deep, wide love of the people who surround us. We are worthy love love. You are worthy of love.

I find some measure of comfort knowing Jesus must have been afraid that night, too, as he gathered those beloved friends around that familiar table to break bread once again. He knew they were still learning what he had to say about who God is and how God moves. He knew they didn't quite yet get the hang of how they were to care for each other much less care for the whole world. But the time had come, and Judas was out the door, and he knew they would not find themselves together like that again.

Jesus may have been afraid, but he did not move in fear. He moved in love. He went to each one of them and poured water over their feet. He looked them in the eyes, he answered their questions, he ignored their objections. He slowly moved around the room, caring for their most basic needs. *This is what love looks like*, he showed them. Love puts us on the same level. Love calls us to serve. Love means the teacher is no higher than the student. Love means servant and master are one. Love means I pass you a loaf of bread even if you are about to stab me in the back, and I bless you while I do it. And not just that. I feed you and bless you even though I know the very worst things about you, and I mean it with my heart because I love you.

And when that happens, well, then church happens. When I bless you and mean it with my heart because I love you, no matter what...then everyone will know that I am following after the way of Jesus.

Think on the things of love. Think on everything that you hold dear, the sounds and senses of a day that speaks to your heart. Think on who we are at our very best here. Think on who we might become. Love is an intersection where we gather. Before speaking or moving or declaring or acting or deciding or debating or choosing, we are commanded to love.

Jesus said, "Little children, love each other like I love you. Then everyone will know you are mine."

Blessing the Bread, the Cup For Holy Thursday

Holy Thursday, and it is time to come to the table.

Here at the table, there is bread.

Here at the table, there is wine.

Here at the table, there is Christ, offering the gifts to us with beautiful simplicity and astonishing love.

As we linger at the table, as we leave the table, what will we do with what we receive?

Let us bless the bread
that gives itself to us
with its terrible weight,
its infinite grace.

Let us bless the cup
poured out for us
with a love
that makes us anew.

Let us gather
around these gifts
simply given
and deeply blessed.

And then let us go
bearing the bread,
carrying the cup,
laying the table
within a hungry world.

—Jan Richardson
from [Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons](#)