

A lot has happened since Maundy Thursday. A whole month, actually! It's doubtful that the readings from our dinner together are still top of mind. They do, however, support our discussion this morning. We read John's account of the Passover meal. But it's not really the meal that's notable.

Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples.

Hmm. Feet. On most weeknights, I get the honor of washing two sets of little feet – I continue to be amazed at how much playground mulch can fit in a six-inch shoe. But there's certainly a leveling effect. I sit on my knees; I roll up my sleeves; I labor to reach down and wrangle squirmy legs and feet; I hold them gently; clean them; towel them dry; apply lotion, and the occasional Band-aid. There's a care to it. And when that care is no longer needed, I'm sure I'll miss it.

But twelve young men, none of whom are my children? They wore sandals all day long. Walked over lots of sandy, rocky substances. Sweaty, stinky, unmanicured feet. Hammer toes and alligator claws! That's not a service I'd be so eager to offer, nor one that I'd be certain not to miss.

But here is Jesus; teacher, friend, mentor acting as servant to his disciples. Holding their feet with care. Most likely seated or contorted in an awkward position. Exposed. Tender. Leveled. Vulnerable. And yet unafraid, using this humble gesture to express love for his friends. Add to that, friends who will betray him, deny him, and abandon him in the coming week.

This is the setting for our text. Jesus acts as servant to his friends, expressing humble love, before leaving the room, and bidding farewell to the comfortable phase of his ministry. He tells them that he's not gonna be with them much longer. And he leaves them with a new commandment: Love one another.

Now there's nothing really new about the *what* part of this commandment. God's people have always covenanted to love God and neighbor. Torah is a trellis to sturdy and shape the vines of love. What should we do? We should love one another.

It's the *how* of Jesus' command that's different. You should love one another, just as I have loved you.

And how did Jesus love the disciples?

Thoroughly. Unconditionally. Wholly.

As a servant.

Without expectation.

Without need for reciprocity.

As people beloved. As people created in God's image. As people with gifts to share and lives of purpose.

"And when you love as I love," Jesus says, "Everyone will know that you are my disciples."

Jesus loved in a remarkable way. He redefined kinship.

He lived in a world that said the only place you could be comfortable was in the presence of people just like you, not just socially, politically, and ideologically, but genetically, too.

To be sure, Jesus had kin. We've heard all about them. His parents, his siblings, even distant cousins. But Jesus didn't limit his family to bloodlines, nor did he limit his birth to the one facilitated by his mother.

Birtherd anew, or perhaps over and over again, in the Spirit, Jesus extended his family to include twelve strangers, not to mention the dozens of women Biblical authors fail to name.

Jesus honored his parents. And I would imagine that on most occasions, his family offered a source of comfort, belonging, and confidence. They'd known him his whole life, and their care and love for him wasn't beholden to present feelings. That is to say, he was their kin on the days he was pleasant, and on the days he was a bit more cantankerous. And they him. But Jesus didn't want family to be the only source, and indeed the ultimate source of belonging. He wanted createdness to be that source.

We often talk about the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus redefines, or rather re-establishes the concept of neighbor. Neighbors aren't just those in your inner circle, they are those persons who live beyond your self-imposed walls. Jesus does the same with family. We are parented by a loving God, and therefore we are children in God's family.

Jesus pushes me to expand my definition of family and neighbor – it's not that I'm called to love neighbor or family in a different way. It's that

I extend the kind of love I offer to neighbor and family beyond those circles I have traditionally defined as family and neighbor.

How did Jesus love the disciples like family? He shared himself – his mind, his heart, his time, his energy, his resources, his presence. He told them truths, internal and external, even the ones they didn't want to hear. He listened to them, was patient with them, gave them space to grow and learn. He challenged them without deflating them. He participated in a cycle of loving and wounding and healing and forgiving and doing it all over again because he valued their humanity more than he valued his pride. He vocalized his love – in word, in touch, in deed, in action, in thought, in heart, mind, and spirit.

I suppose the question for us this morning is, "How do we love like Jesus? How do we offer familial and neighborly love to those created, beloved children of God who live beyond our homes, and cul-de-sacs, and meetinghouse walls?"

There are a million things we could do that Jesus did, but three come to mind. I think we have to be truthful, transparent, and trusting.

I think we have to tell the truth. Not the stylized version. Not the comfortable version. But the real version. Jesus was very clear about what discipleship was and what it wasn't. His was not a kinship rooted in privilege. His was one rooted in humility and service. We need to be honest with ourselves about who we are as a community, and how our choices and expressions reflect the God we claim to serve. Are we creating families and neighborhoods that preserve a distanced and safe love, or are we creating families and neighborhoods that transcend our politics, our power structures, and ideologies? If our I-love-you

statements are always followed with as-long-as-you-are statements, then we aren't being truthful enough to love like Jesus.

I think we need to be transparent. It's not just that we love, it's that we aren't shy, and we aren't ashamed to express our love. If we choose to be a people who love our neighbors as we love God and ourselves, then let's not be so choosy about when, and where, and to whom we express our love. Ours cannot be a love of comfort and convenience, it must be one of consistency.

Finally, if we are to love as Jesus loved the disciples, we must place our trust in God and one another. The love that sparks truth in our hearts, souls, and minds tells us to love our neighbors regardless of who they are, or the choices they make, or the choices we make. We have to trust that at the end of the day, the love we share with the world is a whole lot more powerful, lasting, and transformative than we can imagine. We have to trust that God's love has the capacity to resurrect, reclaim, and renew what systems can't. We have to trust that God's love and possibilities are worth trusting in.

Jesus commanded us to love one another as he loved us. Good friends, may God grant us the strength, the courage, and the patience to live out, and ultimately love out such a command. Amen.