

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Bethany Ulrich

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Today, Maundy Thursday, is the first part of a three day service. On this first day, we are in limbo. We are in between the long Lenten season and on the threshold of what's to come. We have engaged in self-examination, fasting and prayer. As we said in our confession moments ago, in this Lenten season we have "heard our Lord's call to struggle against sin, death, and all that keeps us from loving God and each other."

Tonight, we sit with this struggle a little bit longer as we remember Christ's final instruction to his disciples.

Jesus' new and final commandment that he gives his disciples in the gospel of John is the commandment to love one another as he has loved them. As we remember that it is not as easy as it sounds, we realize that the struggle of Lent is not just for Lent, it goes on into the three days, and even into easter and every day we try to live as baptized individuals who love God and each another.

The disciples struggled with this commandment when it was first given. Especially *the way* Jesus was calling them to love. Whether they knew it or not, they had a set of rules of what love looked like in their context- which involved a slave washing their master's feet or a host washing a guest's feet. But Jesus washing their feet

and them being commanded to wash each others' feet- just DID NOT fit within these rules. Peter, for example, was vocal about how he didn't think his teacher was fit to wash HIS feet.

Like Peter, I often have rules that I've made unconsciously about who to love, how to love, when to love and I object if love and service don't fit neatly within those confines. If you find yourself in the same boat as myself and Peter, perhaps something inside of you too resists experiencing complete and abundant love and acceptance that Christ wants us to experience. Perhaps you find it difficult to receive kindness or an act of service from others because you are usually the one who does these things.

While the struggle against sin, death, and all that keeps us from loving God and each other is continual, luckily Jesus' example of loving service gives us a clue of how to find strength and renewal during the struggle.

Priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal recorded the thoughts of a campesino farmer named Alejandro from Solentiname, Nicaragua about this commandment. Alejandro thought that this commandment is so radical because it doesn't just say "love others." Rather, Jesus says love *each other*- and to Alejandro, that means "love and ask for love."¹ It implies a mutuality.

¹ Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976) 547.

The disciples would have to stretch themselves like Peter to accept having their own feet washed. To accept the complete love of Christ lavished upon them. And they'd have to adopt Jesus' concept of love- one that would be marked by mutuality- a teacher washing his student's feet and the invitation to wash each others' feet. The invitation to be a community in his absence, a group of people that wouldn't just coexist together but that would care and be concerned about one another, would be vulnerable with one another, give love as well as be bold enough and to receive love from one another.

In a moment we will depart with the stripping of the altar and in silence. As we do this, we are reminded of Jesus who was stripped of his clothes before his death, and we are reminded that the struggle against sin, death, and all that keeps us from loving God and each other is one to which we are called at our baptism and is ongoing as we continue from Lent and continue this Holy Week journey.

And luckily today too we are not abandoned and not alone on the journey. You see, moments ago, after confession, we received a word of forgiveness we were ALSO reminded of the grace offered to us along the journey, of the forgiveness, and the renewed promise of reconciliation offered by God in the struggle.

We were reminded of that we've received grace to update what our unconscious rulebook says about love and service: to let ourselves be the recipients of Jesus' full and complete love and to allow for the mutual love that Christ models for us and calls us to, Grace to struggle in community as we seek to meet needs and be

vulnerable enough to share our own needs. Forgiveness for our errors in our struggle- because there will be many- and grace to be able to forgive others for their fumbles as well.

Today we are invited to sit in the struggle. But also we are invited to recommit ourselves to it, knowing that there is strength for the journey, companions as we continue moving through the three days into Easter and beyond. And infinite love waiting to surround us and this community through it all. Amen.