

Maundy Thursday
March 24, 2016
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[click here to read scripture passages for the day](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Peter is one of my favorite disciples because he is constantly getting it wrong. If God could use even Peter, then there's hope for the rest of us that God can work even when we're clueless and confused. In the story we just heard, Peter again gets it wrong in a big way. He says to Jesus, "you will never wash my feet", and then does a complete about face and commands Jesus to give him a full sponge bath - "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

Peter has a few control issues. But then again, don't we all - especially when it comes to personal cleanliness, to bodies and our senses - the things we've been talking about all Lent? I'm one of those people who can't stand too much background music when I'm trying to have a conversation. Some of us get uncomfortable if people stand too close and enter our own personal bubble. Some of us can't function without our physical space looking clean and orderly while others feel like it's a waste of time to stay on top of the clutter.

We so easily can get rigid and judgmental of people who do things differently. I once worked as a nanny for a woman who would look around at her cluttered house, sigh and say, "oh well, a perfectly kept house is the sign of a misspent life." I've found that statement to be incredibly liberating when I think about the way my husband and I keep house and often repeat it to our babysitters. Yet, there is so much judgment of others woven in there. Just because I don't prioritize cleaning doesn't mean people who keep a clean, welcoming house are mispending their lives!

When I was in seminary I became close friends with a woman from Norway who harshly judged the current American practice of putting on clean clothes every day - "Such waste, such prudishness", she'd mutter every morning as she emerged from her room in the same skirt, sweater and tights she'd worn every day for a week and took stock of our daily wardrobe changes. Of course, she could also pull off wearing the same rumpled clothes because she was 6 feet tall, in phenomenal shape and drop dead gorgeous.

We so easily can get rigid and judgmental of people who do things differently. But of course, all of this just scratches the surface of our deeper superiority and control issues. We want things to be on our terms in the ways that seem good and right to us.

- Sure, we can go to worship and confess our sins as long as we like the way that the worship service happens.
- We can serve others as long as we feel good about the cause and the way the service is being done.
- We can be nice to those who hold different opinions as long as we get to shred them to pieces with like-minded people later.
- We can pretend that we're being thoughtful and kind but still choose to do exactly what we want to do.

We compare ourselves. Well, maybe I don't compost like her but I don't drive a car as much as he does. Maybe I don't volunteer in the community as much but I help at church more. We find all sorts of ways to feel superior to others - to people who go to that church, or watch that network, or eat like that, or deal with new technology that way.

All of this, of course, makes it pretty challenging to keep the new commandment Jesus gave us on the night he washed feet - to love one another as he has loved us. It's pretty hard to love when we feel the need to justify ourselves, be in control, and seem morally superior to others. What a contrast all of our issues are to what Jesus knew about himself and how that shaped his actions. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around himself."

Jesus knew that he belonged to God, that his future was in God, that his value came from his relationship with God.

- With that deep knowledge, he freely offered himself in loving, tender, self-giving service for his disciples.
- And, he freely offered himself to all of them - to Judas who he knew would betray him, to Peter who he knew would deny him, to all of them.

The kind of love that Jesus gave to his disciples has nothing to do with control and moral superiority. It has everything to do with Jesus letting go of power and freely giving himself away. As Philippians 2, a scripture we heard Sunday, puts it - "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." Jesus knew he belonged to God and that all that he needed was found in God. So he could empty himself, give himself away, and as John tells us - "love his own until the end", no matter what.

You, too, belong to God. You are one of Jesus' own for he came to give himself freely for you, to serve you, to bless you, to love you to the end -

- no matter how much you doubt that;

- no matter how many times you have betrayed and denied him;
- no matter how many issues you have.

You belong to God, you are one of Jesus' own, and he will love you and serve you always - no matter what.

Jesus comes to you, to all of us, again and again to cleanse us, serve us, and bless us -

- even when we don't think we need to be cleansed;
- even when we are sure others need cleansing more;
- even when we feel we need to serve more than be served.

Jesus comes to bless us, and that blessing poured out upon us shapes us into people who can freely love, serve and bless the world.

Let's take a few moments to simply rest in the assurance that we belong to God and have all that we need to love and serve one another.