



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

*He loved them to the end*

Maundy Thursday, *Year A*, April 9, 2020

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*Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

John 13:1

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the weeks leading up to the birth of my son, I had several compelling experiences of God's love. The weather was much like it is now – new spring with buds everywhere and a soft, warm sun. I was uncomfortable by that time, but I needed the fresh air, and I would take short walks, waddling slowly to the park near our home and back. And for many days in a row, when I would sit under the trees on the park bench, I would feel overwhelmed by the presence of God. Each time I would feel God with me and then this unfolding of love in my heart for my son. I felt so close to my son, filled with this wordless knowledge that he and I were bound together in this world, our unwritten futures stretching out before us. These experiences sustained me as a mother expecting her first child, and I assumed that that feeling of joy and peace would follow me into new parenthood.

And *then* my son was born. I'm sure those of you who have children are smiling, thinking about your first experiences too. But even if you have never had children, many of you have had those kind of spiritual moments – those mountaintop experiences that we seek out and cherish. And I would hazard to guess that most of us have been surprised to find that what we learned in that sacred place plays out much differently here on earth than we expect. And that's what happened to me. The night after he was born, I held him and was

shocked to realize that in many ways we were strangers. Sure, we had coexisted for months, but we did not yet know each other. Up to that point, my body had met all his need without requiring active effort on my part. And up to that point, he had everything he needed without ever needing to ask.

And then suddenly everything changed – and there we were, he and I, working out a new way of being together. I already knew enough about human development to understand that trust – the foundation of empathy, the expression of love – is not created by feelings alone. Trust is built when you have a communicated need met – not once, not twice – but thousands of times in consistent ways. My newborn son was living in a brave new world where everything was uncomfortable, and he learned he had to call out for someone – me – to meet his need. And I learned that love – that deep spiritual love I felt for him in those moments alone with God – could not be expressed just in words. I had to show my love for him by meeting his needs - in feedings and diaper changes and endless rocking on sleepless nights. It was work...*hard* work. But without this active love, he would not survive, much less learn to love fully. Without this active love, I would have forgotten that God's love is made manifest when we extend our own lives as shelter for another.

Whenever I think of tonight – Maundy Thursday – the words that come to mind are these from John's gospel: *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* (John 13:1). And how did he love them, those who were his own? He demonstrated it for them by bending down, caring for their bodies, meeting their needs. When he returned to the table, he asks them, *do you know what I have done to you?* (John 13: 12). He needed to remind them that students are not more advanced than their teacher. *So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, Jesus tells them, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set an example, that you also should do as I have done to you* (John 13:12-15). It was wise of Jesus to tell them *and* show them what love means. If Christ had just told the disciples to serve one another, they would have faced a great temptation to later over-spiritualize that love - to make

"washing feet" a metaphor, to reduce it to fuzzy feeling. But Jesus knows people of love are not created by feelings alone. People of love are created by building trust, by the experience of consistently having their needs met - not once, not twice - but thousands of times.

Tonight's service is unlike any other Maundy Thursday that we have ever experienced. Suddenly everything has changed, and now we are working out a new way of being together. Perhaps, before all this happened, we managed on our own, not needing to rely on anyone. But now we live in a brave new world where everything is uncomfortable, and we have to learn to call out to one another to get our needs met. These days we know that love – the spiritual love of God – cannot be expressed just in words. We have to show our love by meeting each other's need - for food, for clean hands, for masks, for healing, for companionship from afar. This is work...*hard* work. But without this active love, we know we cannot survive, much less learn to love fully. Without this active love, we would forget that God's love is made manifest when we extend our own lives as shelter for another. *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, says Jesus, if you have love for one another* (John 13:35). Let's do what our Lord and Teacher asks. Let us show our love and follow Him.