

A Single Request: Love

(John 13:1-17, 31b-35)

Homily delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Maundy Thursday, April 18, 2019

In the name of one God, creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.

The hour was almost upon him. The time that he had tried to tell the disciples would arrive was imminent. "It is for this reason that I have come to this hour," he said.¹ "Now is the judgment of this world ... The light is with you for a little longer."² The betrayal was almost at hand.

At this point the fear had not yet overtaken their hearts; the loss and grief had not yet overwhelmed them. For now, on this night, in this place, there is only ... love. A greater love these disciples had never known, and it would only be after the events of the coming days that they would know the true greatness ... the true power ... of this love.

It is a love revealed through the act of the one who was the greatest among them and yet knelt before them to become their servant. He knew they would not understand why he was on his knees, his hands wet with the water from the basin, washing their feet. Peter tried to insist he not do it, and then when he thought he might miss something he reversed course and was all in. Peter, the loving, faithful, flawed disciple, once again got it wrong ... carried away by his enthusiasm and blinded to the truth of what was happening.

One day, he will understand. It will not be in his time; the understanding will come to Peter ... to all of them ... in God's time.

And when he had finished, when the washing was done and he had again taken a seat in their midst, he gave them ... a commandment. It was a commandment given in a way that there would be no misunderstanding ... no confusion ... no ambiguity.

Love.

He had loved them, and he loved them still. Surely the certainty of that knowledge lingered somewhere in each of their hearts. Even the one who would betray him ... the one whose heart had been touched by the devil to perform the act that would set off the tragic chain of events ... was loved. It was a love that believed all things ... that hoped all things ... that endured all things. It was a love that believed in them ... hoped for them ... and yes, that even endured them.

¹ John 12:27 (NRSV).

² John 12:31, 35 (NRSV).

It was a love that was unbounded, a love that could not be contained ... and that could not ever truly be described. It was the love of **God**, a love made incarnate and a love given to all who came near. No matter how many times these friends tried to get it right and missed the mark, no matter how little they may have truly understood it, they ... were ... **loved**.

They would need the knowledge of that love ... the **certainty** of it ... in the coming days. But before then, he needed to prompt them ... to give them a little nudge. And so in this dimly-lit room, seated with those with whom he was closest and had experienced so much, he spoke: "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."³ The world is here because of God's love; I am here as a sign of God's love; you have received the gift of God's love. Now go ... and **love**.

Do this, and everyone will know who you are ... and **whose** you are.

The rest of this night would be difficult, in ways the disciples could not yet imagine ... and in the darkest corners of their mind would not **want** to imagine. Tomorrow would be far worse ... the worst day of their lives. The literal darkness of this night would become the figurative darkness that would overshadow them and their world.

But on this night ... in this place ... in this man ...there is ... **love**.

Amen.

³ John 13:34 (NRSV).