

2016_03_24 Maundy Th | Sermon
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

A Love that Endures to the End

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

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Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has loved us to the end and who has given us a commandment that we should love one another. Grace and peace to you all in His enduring love. Amen.

John 13:1

Having loved His own who were in the world,
He loved them to the end.

In Jesus name, dear fellow servants of the most high God, An elderly woman was lying on her bed, in her home, tubes strangling about, lights and beeps, on and off, a nurse standing over her with a clip board. She was placed on hospice just days ago and no one could say how much longer she would live.

Although there was a nurse there, she was very much alone. Her husband was dead. She had no children. Her family was never close, and honestly didn't care to have anything to do with her. So there she was, her hour had come, and she wondered who be with her in her last moments.

The situations where love is truly exercised is not when everything is going well, or when we are in situations which make us feel most comfortable, but when things are strained, when times turn ugly, when something must be given up for someone else.

Where does love come from anyway? I once was talking with someone who was going through a tough time and didn't seem to have any sense of needing or caring about God; I asked her, don't you care anymore? And the response was, "I tried caring, really; but it just didn't turn out well." We give and give and give, and there comes a point where we simply run out. We get hurt. We feel betrayed. We can give only as much as we receive. And when a relationship has run out of love, it can lead to a person simply giving up, not caring anymore.

It is as if our cup has run out. As long as someone keeps pouring love into our cup, there is love to give; as long as we are receiving someone else's sacrifice, care, self-

giving, it is as if we have a reservoir filled up, and we can give back to others. But when that reservoir is not being filled, when others are always taking love, but never returning, we begin to run dry until there is nothing left to give.

Jesus' hour had come and he knew it. And what that means is that the hour had come for him to suffer, to drink of another cup; the cup of God's wrath. This is why he prays in chapter 12, "Now my soul is troubled and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."

His hour had come when things would turn ugly and he would have to give what no one else could give: an enduring love. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." Tonight we see how Jesus' love was an enduring love, one which loves to the end. He loved his disciples to the end. He loves you to the end. And His love in you becomes a love for each other to the end.

He takes off his outer cloak and wraps a towel about his waist. He fills the bowl with water. And he kneels down. There, the Lord of heaven and earth, the one who created that water, now takes it and begins to wash their feet.

I don't know if you've ever had to deal with feet, but they are not the most attractive part of a person's body. And these feet in particular are not well manicured. They are the feet of pilgrims, who walk on dirt paths day after day, who wear sandals and whose feet are filthy.

With all that was going on in Jesus' mind, the things that were approaching this night, the stress and anxiety of this hour, there he is, on his hands and knees, giving of his time, giving of his intimacy, giving of himself for the sake of his disciples.

But it was meant to do more than just clean their feet, it was an act of salvation. This was the Messiah doing what he had come to do – love them to the end.

To the end. And here John means "the end" not in terms of the end of the story, and not only the end of Jesus' life, but the end in terms of the completion of all he had come to do. This word is used several times in John's Gospel. In chapter 4, Jesus says, "I must bring the work of my Father to its end." That is to say, He must complete his work. In chapter 17, then he prays to His father and says, "I have brought the work you've given me to its end." In other words, He has reached his goal of his sacrificial work now, and that goal is the cross. And finally from the cross in chapter 19, Jesus takes a sip of sour wine and says, "It has reached its end." In other words, the work is complete and salvation has reached its goal. Or as your Bible translates, "It is finished."

He loved them to the cross and to death, to the completion of this work, and that is the greatest and most enduring love; the source of all love.

What about you? What about when your hour has come? How do you feel when it is you on that hospice bed or that hour in your life where you think you are alone. No one knows what you are going through. You've been hurt, betrayed even. Or it seems there is no one you could tell about the things you have been thinking, feeling, the things you have done. What about when the love you need is so intimate, so personal that you can't imagine another ever letting someone get that close?

But Jesus gets that close. "Having loved his own who are in the world, He loved them to the end." He loves you to the end. It is a love which does not waver at the circumstance. It does not change with the times. Jesus was deserted by all, yet he would never desert you. Even his own Father would leave him. But his love for God and his love for you would not change. Jesus is the source of all love. In the face of our sins, our lack of faith, our trials and failures to love God as we should, Jesus' love endures and God's forgiveness, strength, and personal care endures as well.

This is an intimate love, given for your very sins in his true body, poured out for your very uncleanness in his true blood. As the Psalmist says, "I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord." That is the cup that is given to you this evening. It is given in the bread and poured out in wine.

This is a love which comes to you on your hospice bed and helps you in your hour of trial. This is the love which changes your clothes when you can no longer do it for yourself. This is the love which washes your beddings when they are dirty; this is the love which visits with you when no one else seems to care. This is the love which washes your feet, in the most intimate and personal of ways and says, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

This is the love which we drink together. The Lord's Supper is about drinking God's love, forgiveness, grace, and unselfish care. And as we do this, we receive a new commandment: "that you love one another; as I have loved you, so you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

The question is, in the end, how well do you know one another? Really. As a congregation of Christ's disciples, how intimately do you know each other? Do you email or call each other outside of church? When someone is having health troubles or financial difficulties, do you ask to help? When someone hasn't been coming to church

for a while, do you notice? Do you know how to reach them? Do you pray for them, send them an email or make a phone call? When an elderly woman is laying on her hospice bed with no one left to love her, do we have the time to make a visit?

She is lying on her bed, in her home, tubes strangling about, lights and bleeps, on and off. The nurse is changing shifts and meeting with over night staff. And there you are. Feeling a bit uncomfortable; death is an ugly business. But she is a member of your church. And there you remember the Lord, kneeling down with a towel about his waist, taking the feet of each of his disciples into his own holy hands and making them clean. And there you remember the Lord praying, suffering, dying for you and for this elderly woman. And there you kneel down, next to her bed and begin to pray – out loud.

And then the pastor comes. He brings with him the bread and the wine. He says the words, “On the same night...” And together the three of you take up the cup of salvation. A cup that never runs dry. A cup that is overflowing. And in those last moments, in that intimate place, you the love of Jesus spills over into our world: a love that endures to the end. Amen.