

April 1, 2021
Maundy Thursday
United, Oak Park

Love, Love, Love

If you grew up in a Lutheran church sometime in the 1960s and early 1970s—as I did—you may remember a simple, but rather catchy song that went like this:

Love, love, love! That's what it's all about!
'Cause God loves us, we love each other,
mother, father, sister, brother.
Ev'rybody sing and shout, 'cause that's what it's all about!
It's about love, love, love! It's about love, love, love!

The text and tune for that song were written together by Lois and Herb Brokering, a remarkable couple who happened to belong to the same congregation in the Twin Cities where my wife and I were once members. Lois and Herb each had an infectious love for children, for songs, and for words. How many Sunday school and Vacation Bible school children must have sung this song in the 50 years or so that it's been around?

While the message of the song is simple, it's no less true because of its simplicity. This is also what Maundy Thursday tries to do for us each year: to rehearse with us the basic, simple story about love that

Jesus enacted with his disciples on the night before he was betrayed and crucified.

Our gospel reading for this evening gets to the heart of what the Christian mission is when Jesus took off his outer robe, tied a towel around himself, and began washing the disciples' feet. It is here that the genuine intent of the Lord's Supper becomes clear: this is not just a meal to feed the gathered faithful, but this is a meal that is meant for all those who hunger.

Tomorrow—Good Friday—we will see that Jesus' body is broken for the life of the world. This evening at the Lord's supper we see that the food we receive is broken to feed and give life to all who hunger physically and to all who hunger for justice throughout the world.

Anytime that church leaders begin to feel that our purpose should be focused primarily on meeting the needs of our own members, then passages like the one we have heard this evening offer a helpful corrective. The church's primary mission is getting up from the table and going out to serve the needs of those who are poor or hurting. In short, it's about practicing a gospel of love.

So it is that we at United Lutheran Church have tried to be more intentional about ways that we can meet some of the world's needs. For a number of years we have been emphasizing the ways that we serve others—whether its through our missions of the month or the various social service organizations that we house each year inside of this building. Many of us also support homeless individuals by providing food to clients of Housing Forward.

And there are many other ways that we each serve the community and individuals in need. We *exist* to be a community of love and service; extending welcome and hospitality to people we meet through the life of this congregation, but also offering those same gifts to others.

Even though love is such a common and simple word, it is not always at the foremost of people's thinking. So the readings and songs that we sang together on Wednesday evenings in the last five weeks reminded us about our mission to live out God's love through the many ways in which we are in community with other people and with Christ.

While it may be fairly easy for us to love family members and those who are among some of our closest neighbors, Jesus' teachings about love go much further. They have us loving people who may be considerably different from us, or who require very hard work on our part to love.

This night, while we are particularly mindful of the meal that Jesus shared with his closest disciples—on the night before his ultimate act of love through his death on the cross—we also recall his unfailing ability to take on others' concerns, and to honor each person's dignity and common humanity by kneeling down to wash his disciples' feet.

Yes, in the middle of Holy Week and right at the heart of the Jesus story, it is *all* about *love*.