

Preached by Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA  
April 9, 2009 – Maundy Thursday

John 12:1–8  
John 13:1–17, 31–35  
John 19:16b–30

## **AN ARMY OF STRONG EMOTIONS**

The drama of the foot washing is the most profound expression of God's love for us in all of scripture except for the crucifixion itself. We know what Peter did not comprehend. We know now the most essential attribute being this community is embracing Christ's absolute humble understanding of love. Love always must be tempered by humility.

Such love is strong enough to battle with the army of emotions that we encounter every day—emotions like fear and anger, grief and sadness. The emotion of love is stronger than these. Because it motivates to understand the joy Christ was experiencing even as he knelt and took his disciples feet into his hands.

But first we have to be willing to be so intimate with our own emotions and with the lives of one another. Intimate with what Jesus is doing with his disciples. It's easy to think about humble, self-sacrificial love. It is much harder to live it. And yet it is the very law of our being one body. You see, we will never be the imitation of Christ till we do battle with all the emotions that contradict and erode Christ's love for his disciples this night.

It comes from being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. It comes from moving beyond self, and this has always been Peter's problem. Peter is like the stubborn Scot. He's saying to Jesus, "I will learn what it is you want me to do. I will learn it."

And every time, Jesus says, "It's not up to you, Peter. It's up to me."

You see, the love we are being called to share is absolutely dependent on Christ's spirit—a spirit which leads us to a type of sacramental experience of being engaged with one another. A sacrament which we don't practice until we learn the other sacraments are meant to symbolize for us. The sacrament of service comes from that baptism and the Lord's Supper. We simply cannot decide on our own to embrace such love.

We have to be completely overcome by who Christ is. Remember what Dave Stumbaugh read: After the disciples' feet have been placed in Jesus hands, he now kneels and takes those disciples' feet into His very hands and washes them. How can we live out such an overwhelming emotion of love and joy?

We have examples. All we need to do is look at the Gospel of John. In the first twelve chapters, love is only mentioned six times; but in chapters 13 through 17, which center around the crucifixion, this type of love is referred to over 31 times. This love is not an ideal to be achieved. It is a love to be lived. Have you heard of Hope Community in Illinois—Hope Meadows? It's a neighborhood converted from an old Air Force base. It

took a fair amount of negotiation to get the housing that was part of the base into a non-profit, but this non-profit called Hope Meadows is a community where senior citizens are encouraged to become foster grandparents along side adoptive parents. Eight years ago, a little girl named Carrie came to this community in foster care. She had suffered greatly from neglect at home and she didn't talk at all. Marjorie Davis, one of the seniors living at Hope Meadows, said she was like a zombie. And this retired couple began to offer themselves to little Carrie.

Later Mr. Davis said that he felt Carrie had actually rescued him from being a zombie in retirement, losing all sense of meaning. Together they healed one another. Maybe that's why we are so careful with this sacrament of communion. It's not just any time and place we are meant to honor it; but we have careful guards in place that when we celebrate communion, we recognize it is something that is done for us, not something we do.

Think of it. Two segments of our society often neglected and marginalized—foster children and retired senior citizens. Creatively they've been put together in such a way that an 82-year-old can help with the healing of an eight-year-old abused child. Mr. Davis says that on a typical afternoon, Carrie, who he calls Tickles, brings her bike over and he adjusts the handlebars and the seat and sends her off on her way. And as she waves goodbye to Grandpa Davis, he says, "It's fixed; now scat!"

In the same way, Jesus says to his disciples, "This world needs to be fixed and it can only come when others see the way you love one another, even the least of you, the way I have loved you. Now scat! And do what I've commanded."

Amen.