

# Sermon: Easter 5

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Year C  
Acts 11:1-18  
Psalm 148  
Revelation 21:1-6  
John 13:31-35

Simon Peter was a stubborn man... at the Last Supper... when Jesus came to him... he asked... *Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*... Jesus said... *You won't understand just yet what I'm doing... but later on you will...* and Peter replied... *You'll never wash my feet...* and Jesus countered... *but unless I wash you... you'll have no share with me...* so Simon Peter conceded... *Lord... not my feet only... but also my hands and my head!*

Simon Peter was a stubborn man... he denied Jesus three times... and in John 21... the resurrected Jesus asked him three times... to feed his sheep... we talked about this in Bible Study... the first two times that Jesus asks Peter if he loves him... the Greek word that Jesus uses is *agape*... and the first two times that Peter replies... the Greek word Peter uses is *phileo*...

*Agape*... refers to love in a social or moral sense... *phileo*... is simply to be a friend to someone... so the first two times... Jesus is asking Peter... if Peter loves Jesus enough to be transformed... to become deeply and morally motivated... to feed his sheep... to take care of them... the third time... both Peter and Jesus... use *phileo*... perhaps Jesus realizes that Peter is struggling with this... or is stubborn ...

Simon Peter was a stubborn man... in today's reading from Acts... Peter recounts that in a vision... he saw a variety of unclean animals... and he heard a voice that said... *Get up... Peter... kill and eat...* but stubborn Peter replied... *By no means, Lord... for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth...* and God said... *What I have made clean... you must not call profane...* and so when the circumcised believers

criticized Peter for eating with Gentiles... he replied... *If then... God gave them the same gift that God gave us... when we believed in Jesus... who was I... that I could hinder God?... and when they heard this... they said... Then God has given even to the Gentiles... the repentance that leads to life...*

You will never wash my feet... I will never deny you... I have never eaten anything like that... I will not eat with those people... Peter was attached to rules... to purity codes... to dietary laws about what's edible... and to who's acceptable... But the Spirit is always ahead of the church... and ahead of us... and God said... What I have made clean... you must not call profane... who I include... you must not exclude... who I love... you must not hate... and then I saw the holy city... the new Jerusalem... coming down out of heaven from God... and I heard God say... *love one another... just as I have loved you... you also should love one another...* and I remembered the word of the Lord... how he had said... *John baptized with water... but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...*

In his book Sacred Fire... Fr. Ronald Rolheiser writes... the Gospel speaks about two kinds of baptisms... John's baptism must come first... it is a critical preparation for Jesus' baptism... because it is a baptism of repentance... of acknowledging that we behave in ways which arise out of our brokenness... and of naming... and making a commitment to correct them... and Jesus' baptism... which is an entry into grace and community... which empowers us internally... to do that which would be impossible for us to do by our own willpower alone... this is reflected in the image of the branches and the vine... from which we receive our sustenance and our life... we are not meant to go it alone... disconnected from each other... and from God...

Judas was already gone... when Jesus gave this new commandment... to love one another as he had loved them... and in that love... he washed the feet of one who betrayed him... and the feet of one who would deny him... he loved them as those who

already belong to God... as those who were already children of the Most High... and if children... then brothers and sisters of his only Son...

They share with each other... the love with which he leads them... so that their real desires will be fulfilled and satisfied... because when God comes first... and is all in all... then every desire is fulfilled... as Jesus said in Matthew 19:26... *for mortals it is impossible... but for God all things are possible...*

How unexpected it must have been then... for the disciples to begin to realize... that Gentiles... those who were Other... could become full members of the body of Christ... and that those like the Ethiopian eunuch... who according to Deuteronomy and Leviticus was ritually impure... could be baptized... and grafted on... and become one more branch on God's vine...

In John 14... Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for the disciples... a place they knew... and that they knew the way to get there... Thomas objected... *Lord, we do not know where you are going... how can we know the way?*... to which Jesus replied... we're not talking GPS here... I am the way... and the truth... and the life... no one comes to the Father except through me... and so if you know me... if you understand why I do... what I do... then you will know my Source... because I could never breathe... or think... or do anything... in opposition to that Source... so come and see... follow me... love one another as I have loved you... love one another... love is all you need... love is the answer... selfless... self-emptying... self-giving love...

Do you remember the Delano Grape Boycott of 1965... led by Cesar Chavez and the National Farmworkers Association... upon hearing the news of the strike... millions of Americans boycotted the company in support of the workers' working conditions and pay... by refusing to buy grapes... this was done out of fairness and *agape*... a moral love for the Filipino migrant workers...

Remember the Montgomery, AL bus boycotts... begun when Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus... Jo Ann Robinson... a civil rights activist... made African Americans aware that they represented 75% of the Montgomery bus company's *clientele*... and she organized the first Monday Boycott where all African Americans refused to ride the buses... it was so successful the it continued for another year... carpools were created... African American taxi drivers charged African American passengers only a dime... and white employers even took to driving their African American servants to work... and on December 20, 1956... laws which required buses to be segregated... were declared unconstitutional... this was done out of fairness and *agape*... a moral love for social justice...

On Friday... the House passed legislation which would protect those living in states where it's legal to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity... in employment, housing and other services as well as access to public accommodations such as restaurants... LGBT people currently have no such protections... the bill would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil rights laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics... there are still some details which may need to be ironed out... but this was done out of fairness and *agape*... a moral love for all of God's children...

Today's bulletin cover has a picture of Oz... the Emerald City... a heavenly kind of place... but God's holy city of Jerusalem... descends only from our dualistic minds... and becomes rooted in our unitive... loving heart... which holds things together... even when they seem to be diametrically opposed...

And you may remember this line from a 1974 song... that speaks a truth... that Oz never did give nothing... to the Tin Man... that he didn't already have... which was a heart... and after the Wizard... who's name by the way... was Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmannuel Ambroise Diggs... even after the Wizard unintentionally ascended in his balloon... and Dorothy asked Glinda for her help...

Glinda told Dorothy that she really didn't need her help... that she already had the power within her... she already really knew how to go home... whenever she wanted to... and that power was love... and Glinda said that she didn't tell Dorothy sooner... because Dorothy wouldn't have believed her... she had to learn that for herself...

If we love... how can we not have common sense gun reform... if we love... how can we separate children from their parents at the border... if we love... how can we avoid truth telling and transparency... if we love... how can we deny health care to the sick or those with pre-existing conditions... if we love... how can we perpetuate those systems which maintain food insufficiency... if we love... how can we not pay people a living wage...

We can be like stubborn Peter... holding on to divisions which don't serve us or God well... but we can also be like doubting Thomas... in that we're capable of plumbing the depths of our experiences... and proclaiming... *My Lord and my God*... you see... the Spirit is always ahead of the church... yet Peter realized that God's community... and grace... and love... transcend shortsighted human notions of ritually pure and impure... of who's in and who's out... of who's worthy of God's love and who's not... Peter realized that the love we have for each other in Christ... rises from an inner consciousness which permits only those things that are in line with God's will for us...

In John 16:12... Jesus said I still have many things to say to you... but you cannot bear them now... not now... not yet... but later... and we learn these things... through love... so I ask... who is going to teach you about love today...

Mike+