

Making a House, a Home

[Text - John 14:23-29]

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May 13, 2018

Today's New Testament reading is the culmination of John's account of Jesus and his disciples' Last Supper, on the night before his death. And while this reading doesn't fit chronologically in the Easter Season, it does contain a message that is fitting for every season of the Church Year. It even meshes rather nicely with the theme of Mother's Day; because the very first thing Jesus does that night is remarkably thoughtful, and practically maternal. He humbly washes his disciples' feet! The One to whom they ascribe great honor, displays his genuine greatness, through an act of humble service.

Jesus knows those disciples aren't going to wash one another's feet, because - like competitive siblings - they're all too concerned about their own status and position. And since there are no mothers there to teach those boys good manners, or to make sure that they wash-up before supper, Jesus takes matters into his own hands. He gives them, and us, a marvelous example of what it means to be an authentic child of the Holy One - by attending to the needs of others. And also on that night, Jesus gives his one, ultimate commandment: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, just as I love you!"

The timing of that commandment - right after Jesus humbly serves his friends, and right before he willingly lays down his life - reinforces its tremendous significance. And it also reveals the true nature of Jesus' love. It isn't simply a sentimental feeling; it is a solid and costly commitment, just like a good mother's genuine love. They both involve strength, and sacrifice, and a deep desire to never give-up on any family member. After all, that's what makes a family a *family*: the steadfast commitment that those

members have for one another. And it doesn't matter whether that family makeup is straight or gay, a blended family, a single parent family, an adopted family, or a Church Family - the surest, identifying sign of any good and healthy family, is that unshakable bond of love.

Now obviously, at times, even good families [like our own Family of Faith] may fuss and fight; but they'll try to fight fairly. They'll learn how to "agree to disagree". They'll watch-out for their sisters and brothers, even when they may not feel like it. And through it all, they will accept each member for the unique person that he or she is. In other words, they will take to heart Jesus' words: "Love One another, just as I love you!"

When we think about *how* Jesus loves, we see a love that is warm and open, gentle and gracious, giving and forgiving. Jesus meets people right where they are; and rather than tell them how sinful or worthless they are, he tells them - and shows them - how highly their Heavenly Father/Mother values them. And in the name of that Heavenly Parent, Jesus reaches-out to *all* of his sisters and brothers with compassion and kindness, wholeness and peace. This is the kind of love that Jesus lives for, and for which he is willing to die - a love that doesn't judge, doesn't exclude, and doesn't give-up - a love that even finds the capacity to forgive those who seek to destroy it.

Jesus doesn't just love people who are easy to love, like you or I might be inclined to do. Instead, he chooses to love each and every person he encounters. He specifically welcomes those who are routinely rejected or pushed-aside - the poor and the powerless, society's outcast and oppressed. He warmly embraces lepers and prostitutes, tax collectors and other downtrodden individuals Jesus treats these hurting and vulnerable people with the utmost compassion and care. Yet he also loves those self-righteous individuals who oppose him *because* of his wonderfully

inclusive compassion! He loves them enough to actively engage them, and to challenge them to expand their sadly narrow world view.

Essentially, Jesus never gives-up on *anyone*, no matter how sinful, or prideful, that person might be. He will love them as long as he lives, and as long as his love has a chance to touch and transform their hearts. Even as those who despise him and fear his message put him to death, Jesus still prays that his Heavenly Mother/Father “forgive them, for they know not what they do!” And though they think that they have finally silenced Jesus’ message, by killing the messenger, on Easter morning the Eternal Mother/Father reveals that - ultimately - Life is stronger than death; and Divine Love will always rise-up to triumph over the forces of hatred and fear.

The Living, Loving Christ shows us that our Divine, Creative Source is like a caring and compassionate Parent - One who gives us this wonderful gift of Life, and whose primary concern is that we use our lives to nurture, uplift, and affirm the lives of those around us. After all, this is something that any good mother hopes for her children: that they will find *their* joy and fulfillment, in ways that help bring joy and fulfillment to others.

There’s an old Mother’s Day platitude that goes like this, “Since God can’t be everywhere, God created mothers!” [Aw...how sweet!] Of course this saying ignores the *Omnipresence* of the Holy One. And it also fails to take into account that some mothers aren’t particularly Holy or wholesome, caring or nurturing. Nevertheless, this somewhat syrupy platitude does convey an extremely solid principle: That it is in and through *people*, that the Divine Presence is primarily revealed and experienced.

In this morning’s reading, Jesus says, “those who love me will keep my word, and my Heavenly Parent will love them, and we

will come to them and *make our home* with them!” Jesus and God -Gracious Homemakers! How about that! In this, our Church home, the loving heart of our Heavenly Parent beats strongly in and through the hearts of every parent and child, brother and sister, companion and friend. That’s what makes us a family. That’s what helps us hold together in good times and in bad. That’s what sets us apart from the highly competitive way of this world. And that’s the marvelous gift that you and I can freely share with *all* our brothers and sisters - not just on Mother’s Day, but every day throughout the year.