

“Love never ends”

May 6, 2007

Text: *John 13:31-35, 1Corinthians 13*

I.

In our reading from John’s gospel—as is usually the case—the context is totally important. Jesus had just finished *washing the feet* of his disciples which, although unexpected, was yet a demonstrative act of humility and love.

Feet-washing was a common practice in the world of first century Palestine. People wore sandals, there were dusty conditions, and as the day wore on, a person’s feet would be increasingly ready for a wash. But it was normally the servants who performed the foot-washing.

Therefore, for Jesus, whom the disciples viewed in such lofty and deferential terms, to so humbly and matter-of-factly wash their feet, blew the disciples away. He caught them totally off guard.

This act stamped Jesus’ purpose among them in unmistakable ways ... with its emphasis on servanthood. Certainly, it drew the disciples in, with still greater devotion and commitment, to the movement of the spirit.

Upon washing their feet, Jesus had reflected ...

*So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,
you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you
an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*

It was in this context, the context of *love in action* (prefiguring, as it does, the cross—the pinnacle symbol of sacrificial love) ... it was in this context that Jesus shared with them **the new commandment**: *that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

II.

But what does this mean? All the time, we talk about love.

From his earlier example in the washing of their feet, clearly, **love is a verb**; however, it is also a **vision**. While it is something that we do, more still, it has a sacrificial element that ignites our imagination. It asks of us that we seek the common good ...

- the good that leaves no one out.
- The good that is welcoming of all persons ...

- The good that grants basic human dignity to everybody ...
- The good that seeks—again and again—to see the BIG PICTURE.

In the BIG PICTURE of Christian life and ministry ... consideration is given to every human being, to every tribe and nation.

In the Christian way of things, always, there's a sacrificial element; which suggests, we gotta give up stuff. In other words, we can't have it all. If we tell the truth about ourselves and these time in which we live, increasingly, this has moral impulses.

For, if we think it through, seeking to *lift up* the common good, we should only want what we need. Moreover, still, we should see our needs in light of the needs of the whole, or (again) *the common good*.

III.

In baseball, when a team needs a run, sometimes, with runners on base, a batter will *sacrifice*. The sacrifice can be in the form of a *bunt*, *hitting behind the runner* (like when the runner is on second and the batter hits to the right side of the infield), or a *sacrifice fly*. In each case, the batter is out, but the runner is able to advance, perhaps even score.

- This brand of unselfish baseball characterized the play of the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1960's.

One year, the season was winding down and the Cardinals had already been eliminated from the pennant race, but shortstop Dick Groat had a chance to win the batting title. However, Groat, the consummate team player, was also one of the best in the league at the sacrifice bunt.

As this particular game unfolded, teammate Curt Flood had urged Groat to *go for the batting title* and not to worry, for the rest of the season, about sacrificing. After all, they'd already lost any chance of winning the pennant. Later, when Groat came up with a man on first and nobody out in a tie game, he promptly sacrificed the runner to second.

As he was returning to the dugout, Flood was shaking his head ... implying, *you just don't know how to NOT put the team first, do you?* He couldn't have paid Groat a higher compliment.

Love, in the Christian way of things, always radiates a sacrificial impulse. It's what we do, everyday, to lift up *the common good*.

There's another aspect of love that builds on this ... from 1Corinthians 13 ... and that's that *love never ends*. Most likely, we know this—all of us; but easily, we forget.

Love never ends. It hangs in there, absorbing the bumps in the road. As Paul says in the Corinthians' passage,

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Again, love never ends.

IV.

In the daily unfolding of our lives, friends, all the time, stuff happens. We're up, we're down—encouraged, discouraged. With family and friends, we have good periods and bad periods. The point is, our lives are not perfect.

In other words, every day, every week, there's stuff we gotta work through. But that's okay. That's life.

- However, as we're working our way through things, love doesn't just evaporate and go away. Tough times are *love's moment*; they are love's moment to show its spirit.
 - Again, *love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things ... it never ends.*
 - Which means—always—there's hope; hope that we can work through things! That's what marital love, parental love and all the rest are about.
1. Love cannot be extinguished.
 2. There is no power on earth that can overcome it.
 3. Love can take us to heights we never dreamed of.
 4. It can give us strength and courage we never imagined.

V.

In January of 2006, **Bob Woodruff**, the co-anchor of ***ABC World News Tonight***, was covering the war in Iraq. Bob and his crew were traveling with a U.S. Army tank unit when an IED (improvised explosive device) went off. Bob and cameraman, Doug Vogt, were hit. Bob suffered a traumatic brain injury that nearly killed him.

Bob and his wife Lee tell their terrifying but inspirational story in their best-selling book, *In An Instant*. They chronicle how their lives were suddenly *blown apart* and then, miraculously, *put back together* again.

The surgery on Bob's brain was very serious ... and his wife and family spent an anxious five weeks while Bob was in a medically-induced coma while his brain healed ... and then the drama of to what extent Bob would recover. Would he get better? How much

brain function would he have? Would he remember ... the feelings, the meanings, the memories? Would they get their life back?

They write with candor, grit and humor about the frustration of Bob's painful and slow recovery ... and about wife, Lee's, uncompromising determination to keep her family together, no matter what it took.

In one of the book's most poignant moments, an exhausted Lee touches the nerve of her deepest fear when she asks Bob's neurosurgeon, *I just want to know, will he still love me?*

Wow! The things we take for granted every day, friends. The normal, everyday things we take for granted about each other. We got stuff to be thankful for!

Later, Bob commented, *I can't imagine what it must have been like for her—every day—to stare at my wounds while I slept, holding my hand ... wondering, praying, hanging on to any glimpse of hope.*

When I awoke and saw her face, I can't describe the depths of LOVE that throbbed in my heart and spirit.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends.

VI.

1. We can fail in the stock market, stumble at work, be rejected for the job promotion ... but still, LOVE lives on.

As for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. But no matter, says Paul, for **love never ends**.

2. We can get off track in our faith journey, allow greed to rise up too strongly in our spirit and be way too proud and full of ourselves ... but still, LOVE lives on.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put away childish ways. In other words: for some of us, we never grow up. We just don't *get it* ... at least, not very easily. Still, **love never ends**. It's heart beat lives on.

3. Some of us are incurable when it comes to making bad decisions. Somehow, we never see the BIG PICTURE ... we're always thinking short-term and immediate gratification. Still, through it all, **love never ends**.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains. You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas.
For I am strong, when I am on your shoulders. You raise me up to more than I can be.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlcchurch.com