



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

***Do they know us by our love Maundy Thursday 4/12/21***

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen.

Despite having heard this gospel every Maundy Thursday for several years now, I am continually amazed at how it always seems to speak to me differently. This year, I was particularly struck by how the passage ends with Jesus saying, by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples. If you have love for one another, they will know you by your love.

Notice he doesn't say they'll know you by your incredible worship. They won't know you by your grand cathedrals or magnificent processions, not by your hymns as beautiful as they are, not by your amazing coffee hours back in the day when we used to be able to have them. And certainly not by our quality of our online streaming, no offense, Matt and Andrew and Amy back there, you guys are amazing in mission control. But at the end of the day, none of that is how they will know us as followers of Jesus. They will know us by our love.

It reminds me of a question a former bishop of mine used to ask congregations. He visited, he would do these town halls after the service and invite some Q and A. And at some point, regardless of how big the congregation was or how small they were, or whether they were a wealthy one or a relatively modest one, or whether they were doing really great or just really struggling, he would always ask the same question. If your church were to close today, would your neighbors notice?

I always thought that was such a great question to ask because it's kind of a gut check. Isn't it? It's a check-in to see what is the impact you are really having on your community? Is your church being an asset? Is it being salt and light in the neighborhood? Does it bless your community? Or have you allowed yourself to get so wrapped up in your own activities, your own events, your own needs, your own problems, that you've become somewhat invisible?

And while that's a great question to ask all of our churches, I've always felt it was kind of a fun question to turn onto ourselves. Might go something like this. If you were to stop being a Christian tomorrow, would your neighbors notice? Bear with me here for a moment. But imagine this, if you were to wake up tomorrow and say to yourself, this Christianity thing, it's just too much work. I'm tired of the meetings. I don't want to get up that early anymore. I think I'm going to take a

break. I'm going to take a sabbatical. I'm going to live like everyone else for awhile. Would anyone see a difference if you were to do that? Would your friends or your coworkers notice a change? Would your fellow students at school see a difference? Would your family?

In other words, are you salt and light in your context, in your neighborhood, in your workplace, on your block? Do they know you for your love? And notice in this gospel, it's not just any love that Jesus is talking about. It's not a friendly wave or a polite smile. It's a radical love. It's a head turning, catching you completely by surprise kind of love. And so when he gets down on his hands, on his knees with a towel, and washes their feet, a task that was reserved in those days, only for slaves, Jesus demonstrates what it looks like, what we look like when we love as He loves us, a humble, self emptying servant.

In fact, it's so scandalous, as we heard, Peter tries to refuse it altogether, doesn't he? As he should, because the reign of God, which we seek to usher in, which Jesus has been preaching about, is scandalous. It's an upside down world where authority doesn't come from winning, but from surrendering, where it comes not through power, but through humility, not through resentments, but through forgiveness.

It's a kingdom, which arrives as we saw last week, not with a grand motorcade or military parades, but on a donkey. And whose symbol of authority isn't a sword or vast armies or private jets, but a towel - a towel, the tool of dishwashers and janitors, busboys and midwives. It's no wonder Peter is dismayed. He didn't want this kind of Messiah who comes as a servant, but that's exactly Jesus' posture as he kneels on the floor and washes their feet.

The challenge for Peter and for all of us is to understand the love of God that Jesus is seeking to reveal to us will only be found by letting go of our privilege and our pride, put down our judgments about who deserves it and who doesn't and just get down on our knees, get down on our knees and serve whomever God has put in front of us.

And if you have any doubt about that part, just look at who Jesus is serving tonight. A group of followers who in His hour of need will, to a person, abandon him, deny him, or betray him. He knows all of this, right? And what does he do? Does he call them out? Does he wag his finger? Does he shame them? No. He takes them as the broken, fearful children of God that each of them are, that each of us are, and He humbles himself before them, so that we might do the same. They will know us by our love.

I notice too that Jesus is not just teaching us to love by serving, but to also be served. As Jesus says, unless I wash you, you have no share of me. Not only are we to serve one another, but we are to be served. Not only are we made to love, but to be loved. He is showing us that despite all of our shortcomings, all of our

sins, all of our past mistakes, we too are worthy of being loved and being served by none less than the son of God himself, because we can't give away what we can't receive for ourselves.

If you've seen the same public opinion surveys that I've seen, I don't know what went off the rails, but somehow, somewhere down the road, Christians became known not for our love, but for two things - our judgmentalism and for the inevitable hypocrisy that follows, right? We somehow became the self appointed morality police in the eyes of so much of the public. That nay-saying church lady from Saturday Night Live, that type of image, what happened?

But just imagine if you will. Just imagine if we started to change that and if we started to become known for our love right where we live. Community organizers talk about neighborhood asset maps. If you're not familiar, that's where, when you want to begin to make a positive change in a community, you start with the places that are already making a difference, people who are already a force for good. Things like community centers, non-profits, schools, local businesses, parks, libraries, and yes, when we're doing our work as we should, churches.

Now, imagine if your neighbors were to draw an asset map of your street, of your block of the apartment where you live, or the dorm at school where you hang out. If they were then asked to point out on that map, the positive influences, the people who are already there, who are already a force for good on your street, in your building, in your place of work, would you be listed? Would you be such an asset?

Is your house the place where kids can play after school until their parents come home from work? Do your neighbors look to you for help when there's a problem to solve? Is your dorm room at school a safe haven when a fellow student is bullied? Have you started to use that NextDoor app to start looking after and keep an eye on your elderly neighbors who live alone, or to organize a meal train when someone is sick or grieving?

Or what about your place of work? If you were to ask your coworkers to draw up an asset map of your office building and put it X on the people there who are life-giving, people you can go to for help, people who make you feel appreciated when you need it., people who will listen to you when life has become just too much. Would your desk be on that map? They will know us by our love.

My little sister, Maggie, recently sold her house in Napa and moved out here to beautiful Michigan. And so, yes, if you're keeping score, I now have two siblings who have moved out here from California to join me. It's lovely. It's wonderful. And it occurred to me that as we were looking for homes for her on Zillow, which is an app on your phone where real estate agents list the houses for sale, and

they list all the features in the homes, things like remodeled kitchen, finished basement, high ceilings, all of those things. It occurred to me as I was thinking about this text, that if we were to take Jesus' commandment tonight seriously, if we were to truly be known for our love, then there might be a day, there might be a day when you would look up a house for sale on Zillow and when it came to the features and the neighborhood, right along with things like low crime rate, nearby parks, fabulous view, great schools, that in addition to that, they might also say, that there are Christians next door.

And it wouldn't be seen as like, oh boy. Oh boy. Talk about nosy neighbors, honey. But no, it would be seen like, look, honey, look. There's Christians on that street. That's the place where I want my kids to grow up. That's the place where I want my kids to learn how to ride a bike. That's a street where people are going to know each other. That's a street where people might have each other's back, where we can get help if we needed it, where we could trust our kids with somebody, if it ever came to that. Let's make an offer on that house because that's a street where there will be love.

Does that sound crazy to you? It probably is, but it's no more crazy than the Son of God kneeling down and washing your feet so that we too might be known for our love.

Amen.