

My Dog Sunny and the Apostle Peter Have Something in Common [OR Jesus' Commands Us to Love One Another – How's That Going?] John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Pastor Caitlin Trussell with Augustana Lutheran Church for Maundy Thursday on April 1, 2021

My dog Sunny doesn't like baths. I've seen videos of dogs who loves baths loaded with bubbles, laying on their backs with shower caps on just to be silly. Sunny? Not so much. I have to coax her with treats into the tub and remind her that I love her while she presses her head into my shoulder. This makes washing her face a real challenge. You'd think we'd have this down after almost seven years, but it seems it's as good as it gets. This story about Sunny is a tricky because, yes, I'm comparing Sunny to Peter in the Bible story. He doesn't want a bath either. His issues may be different than her issues, in fact they really are different, but the bottom line is the same. He won't get in the water. Well, he won't put his feet in the water. You'd think he'd have this down after several years of ministry with Jesus. Jesus tells them what to do and they do it, right? Peter seems to mess up the process over and over again. It's handy that Peter does this a lot because it makes it easier to see ourselves in the story. If the Bible were full of perfect people being with a perfect Jesus it would be much harder to connect.

Many of us are like Sunny and Peter. We find it hard to trust and would rather come up with our own ideas. That's pretty much what the Holy Week and Easter stories are – we find it hard to trust and would rather come up with our own ideas. Thank God for Jesus. Jesus reminds Peter and us that our own ideas may not be best for us or each other. The Bible story says that Jesus knew that he came from God and was going to God. Right after that, Jesus gets up from the table, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around his waist and starts washing dirty, stinky disciple feet. He gets to Peter. Peter argues with him. He looks up to Jesus. Jesus is his leader. He doesn't want Jesus washing his feet. Jesus basically tells Peter that this is the way it works. This is the way Jesus works. Jesus is a servant. A servant from God who washes feet and tells us to love each other like he loves us, a love in service to each other.

Before anybody runs out and starts washing other people's feet, think bigger. We are named 'child of God' as we're bathed in the water of baptism in the name of

the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Children of God, washed by God. Like Jesus in our Bible story today, we can say that we now come from God and one day we will go to God.¹ That's handled. And by the power of the Holy Spirit through our baptism we are given gifts that help us serve in the way that Jesus asks us to serve.

During Communion Instruction class, I asked each parent to say something that they liked about their child. The answers included "love of music, zest for life, loves dogs, kind, snuggly, determined, and loves to read." Being limited to one answer is tough. I'm sure the lists of what you parents like about these kids would be a mile long. But the point is this, the list of qualities, things about you that make you you, these can also be called gifts from God. Gifts that you can use to serve and love the world. It's pretty simple even though we complicate it with ambition, goals, and what everyone else seems to be doing. Those are distractions. Gifts you're given to serve are the very ones you're given to lead. Jesus led his disciples and leads us with wisdom, determination, kindness, intensity, vulnerability, love, grace, and more – a real mishmash of gifts. We're not Jesus but we're similarly mishmashed.

It's been a mishmash kind of year though, so we fit right in. It's been a year of figuring a lot of things out including how to serve each other. Our old standbys of service like hugs, spending time with people who need a boost of emotional support, serving meals, and holding a hand have been changed. Everyone who works or goes to school outside their home has experienced dramatic changes in how we serve through our different roles. We had to get creative in our ways to work, learn, serve, and stay in touch. Reimagining so much of our lives has been an adjustment in using our mishmash of gifts.

Jesus doesn't leave us there though, with our confusing jumble of gifts. Jesus gives us each other as the church to figure out those gifts and he gives us the food we need for the journey. That's what Holy Communion is about at its most basic level. It's food for the journey of faith. First, it's food for the journey purely as a gift from God - a blessing and promise of forgiveness and faith from God to us. It's

¹ John 13:3

also food for the journey to do what God asks us to do. To be strengthened and freed to love and serve each other as Jesus loves and serves us.

Jesus' meal of bread and wine that we share in communion draws us deeply into an even wider community too. The other Bible story that we heard together was long ago. It's called the Passover story. It's a story about how God freed God's people from slavery in Egypt. Our Jewish cousins in the faith celebrate Passover to this day. Jesus was a Jew and connected the lifeline of Passover to the lifeline that we celebrate as Holy Communion when he was with his friends at a Passover celebration. Jesus expanded the promise that God made to the Jews to be a promise for all people. His new covenant connects us with God's ancient promises as we move into the future. Jesus' set a table for one and for all people, as Jesus table set for you.

Things happen quickly during communion. There are words, and prayers, and often singing. It can be easy to miss what's happening in the special celebration that Jesus gave us. The words from our other Bible reading are the main words to hear. Listen to that Bible reading again:

...Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. [1 Corinthians 11:23b-25]

These words are the promise. Jesus promises that what he did – every word he spoke against harm, greed, and hatred while speaking for love of God, enemy, and neighbor, for grace and forgiveness, for faith and generosity, for hope and healing; every word that made him that much more vulnerable to death on a cross – is a promise strong enough to claim us by faith.

Today we celebrate Jesus's table, where there is a place for everyone and there is a place for you.