



I'm Not Enough

SCRIPTURE:
John 13:1-11

May 9, 2021 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are

The passage begins by talking of Jesus' love. It says, in our translation, that Jesus loved his disciples to the end. Others translate this verse: he loved them to the full extent. One is a reference to time—to the end. He would never stop loving them. The other is a reference to the quality of his love. He showed them what real love looks like. It's best not to choose, but to hold them together. For the love of Christ is one that loves to the end and to the fullest extent. It's a love that calls you by name.

Her name was Lake. She lived across the street from my grandmother. They were friends. My grandmother was down in the back, as they say in South Carolina. It was not an uncommon situation for her.

Lake knocked on the back door because that was the door closest to the kitchen. She said, "Here, Tommy, this is dinner for you and your grandmother. I know Boss is on the road." Boss was my grandfather's name. The name was the only sense in which he was the boss. About that time, my grandmother hobbled into the kitchen. "Lake, what in the world?"

"Now, Lorraine, you know you are down in your back. I just brought some supper."

"You shouldn't do that. I'm fine," she said with a grimace.

"Now, just stop it. You know you can't cook like that."

They went back and forth; my grandmother appearing to be insulted by the kindness demonstrated by her neighbor, and Lake insistent that we were going to eat her chicken and dumplings, like it or not. I didn't understand why my grandmother didn't just say, "Thank you so much, Lake. You are a

lifesaver." But that's because I was 8 and didn't know the challenges to friendship.

You may think that my grandmother was prideful here. That would be a reasonable assumption. But it was more complicated than that. The truth is she was more ashamed. Ashamed of being in need. Ashamed of other things, of which I am sure I will never know. But she seldom felt like she was enough.

Pride can often be a good cover for a feeling of inadequacy or even shame. At the age of 8, I didn't have the language to name the dance of pride and shame that can so often get in the way of friendship.

Most of us have a sense of our own inadequacies. Sometimes there is something in our lives we deeply regret. We may even feel ashamed. And when we do, it's not uncommon to respond by saying, "Oh, now why did you do that? You shouldn't have done that."

We live with an eternal internal second-guesser who tells us we are not enough. And it is powerful because shame is a hard condition to shake.

The passage that we read this morning is usually read during Holy Week, as that is when this moment falls in Jesus' ministry. It's the last supper Jesus shares with his disciples. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us what Jesus did at the table, how he served them at the table with bread and wine which he told them was his body and blood.

But John tells us what happens before they got to the table—that Jesus took a towel and began to wash his disciples' feet. It made them uncomfortable. Peter is the only one to object but I imagine it made them all uncomfortable. Jesus is not supposed to wash their feet. They should do that themselves, or if you entered a house and the master of the house

had servants, the servants would wash the guests' feet. But Jesus is Jesus, their leader, their lord... he's not supposed to take care of them in this way. Peter sounds proud here. Yet, if I understand the text, what's behind his bluster is a sense of unworthiness, maybe even shame. They weren't worthy; at least that is what Peter says. I'm not enough.

Several times in my life I have been involved in planning a worship service, usually for a retreat of some kind, and someone will suggest, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to include foot washing during the service? This beautiful, intimate moment of foot washing... wouldn't it be wonderful?" And I think, "No, no, no... this would not be wonderful; it would be awkward. I don't want someone washing my smelly, clammy, unpedicured feet. Who does that?"

It's awkward but in Jesus' day, it was a common practice of hospitality. So, the awkwardness was not in the act itself, but in who was doing it. And the truth is, Peter didn't feel worthy. It echoes a moment that Matthew tells us, when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. John says, "No, no, no... I can't baptize you; you are the one who should baptize me. I am not worthy." Worth is a tricky thing.

In Fredrik Backman's novel, *Us Against You*, the town of Beartown is described this way. "There are both good and bad people living here, and that makes us complicated, because it isn't always so easy to see the difference. Sometimes we're both at the same time."¹

Indeed. Our theology is that good people do bad things and bad people can do good things; we are all a mixed bag. And that can leave us feeling like we are not enough at times.

It can cause us to say, "No, Jesus, you shouldn't do that for me. Thaddaeus and Matthew, they deserve it, but not me."

I've shared before that the most frequently read article in *The New York Times* in 2016 was titled "Why You Will Marry The Wrong Person." The author says when we first meet each other, we try so hard to impress, to put a good foot forward, but the whole truth of ourselves shows up sooner or later.

He says, when they have time to get to know us, they will learn about our particular kind of dysfunction. He's right. When we have friends, they know us. They know the whole truth of us.

That's what Peter was saying: I can't have you wash my feet because I am not worthy of *this*; and not only that, you know I'm not worthy. He was uncomfortable—maybe even ashamed. Sounds like Peter doubts that he is enough.

Today is Mother's Day and today we baptized Andrew and Anne, Colin and Margaret. They are just barely or not quite a year old. They are as cute as they can be. But apart from that, it's hard to tell much about them. We don't know what talents they will demonstrate. We don't know their interests. Their parents don't know either. It will be fun to see who they become as they grow up.

But their parents won't need that information to love these little ones. That's the thing about becoming a parent... you love them not because they are smart or talented. You love them not because they let you sleep through the night, for at various ages, for various reasons, they will keep you awake at night. You love them not because they make you laugh or always make their beds in the morning. You love them because they are yours. They belong to you, and not because of what is in their hearts, but because of the love in your heart as their parent. Are they worthy of that love? Wrong question. Love that loves to the end, love to the fullest extent, is not something we earn.

These parents love their children just because they are their children. Now don't get me wrong; no one cares more about who these children become than their parents. But no matter who they become, they will belong.

If I understand the text, Jesus girds a towel, takes a bowl of water, and washes his disciples' feet. He knows them. He knows they are a mixed bag. He knows Peter is the kind of guy who one day walks on water and another day is called Satan, and on a day coming very soon, he will deny him. And even so, Peter is enough.

1 Fredrik Backman, *Us Against You*, (2018) p. 364.

Trust this: you are enough. You are loved by God and there is nothing that will change that. You don't have to get things right all the time—and sometimes you might even do things that you are ashamed of—but you are still a child of God and that is enough.

So, when your friend shows up with kindness and you are tempted to say, “Lake, what in the world are you doing? You know you shouldn't...”. Let that go and just welcome the gesture of friendship, for it is not something you need to earn.