

What? Me Worry?

[Text - John 15:9-17]

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In the two weeks that I was out of action, I had a lot of time to think. I'm not saying that I *don't* think during those weeks that I'm working! On the contrary, my mind's as sharp as a...as a...O, come on, what' that word...as a TACK! Anyway, during my time off, with all of the random thoughts - and the real concerns - that rattled around my brain, there was one particular area in which I had absolutely no distress or worries. And that was the continuing health and spiritual well-being of this Family of Faith. The care and support that I received from you, is indicative of the intrinsic sense of ministry which is embodied within this congregation. And as "luck" would have it, the assigned Gospel text for this 6th Sunday of Easter just happens to reveal and reinforce the basic principle behind this church's core theological understanding, *and* this Community's Life-affirming compassion.

Today's New Testament reading is about Jesus and his followers gathering on the night before his death. And while it doesn't fit chronologically in the Easter Season, it does contain a message that is fitting for any season of the Church Year. And it even meshes quite nicely with today's "Mother's Day" celebration. As Jesus gathers with his friends, he does something that is absolutely astonishing: he takes-off his robe, wraps himself in a towel, and washes his disciples' feet! The One who they call Teacher and Lord, displays his true greatness, through an act of humble service. Jesus knows that those disciples aren't going to wash the dirt off one another's feet, because 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 - giving them, and us, a marvelous example of

what it means to be a genuine child of God - by attending to the needs of God's other children. And then, Jesus gives his *one* parting instruction: "Love one another, just as I have loved 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 importance. 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 makes no difference whether the couple is straight or gay, if it's 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 at times, good families [like our own Family of Faith] will 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 heed Jesus' words: "Love One another, *just as I* have loved 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 Parent values them. And in the name of that Heavenly Parent, Jesus reaches-out to *all* of God's children, with compassion, 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 those people who are easy to love, like you or I might be inclined to do. Instead, he chooses to love each person he encounters. He welcomes those who are routinely rejected and pushed-aside - the poor and the powerless, the lame and the lepers. He embraces those who the religious establishment has written-off as being unfit for Divine grace - tax collectors and prostitutes, Samaritans and other so-called "outsiders". 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 view of Divine love and grace.

Essentially, Jesus never gives-up on *anyone*, no matter how sinful, or prideful, he or she may 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 when those who deeply despise him and fear his message have him put to death, Jesus still prays that God will "forgive them, for they know not what they do!" And though they think that they have finally silenced Christ's message, by eliminating the messenger, on Easter morning the Son rises to reveal that the Eternal Mother/Father has a far more glorious idea for how Life's Story will ultimately unfold!

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, and 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 fulfilment, in

ways that help bring joy and fulfillment to others. This is also what any good Pastor hopes for his or her congregation: that all those involved will find a Divine sense of peace, joy, and love - by sharing Christ's peace, joy, and love with others. Because when this is the distinctive feature of a Family of Faith, then the Pastor doesn't have to worry! Even if he's not the sharpest star in the shed....Or not the brightest tool in the sky...You know what I mean!