

# Saint Raphael's Episcopal Church

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## “Submissive Love”

A sermon by The Rev. J. Alice Marcum  
Maundy Thursday 2006

We gather here this evening to remember the last supper of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For the disciples, this evening began like other Passover evenings they had shared with their Teacher, but for Jesus this evening was set apart from those of the past. This evening was different for Jesus, because He knew that this was His last time to share a meal with those whom He held so dear. Jesus knew that one of His friends would betray Him and that the end result of that betrayal would be Jesus' own death. It is when death is imminent that our perspective on life changes.

Many of you know that this has been a stressful time for my family. Saying good-bye to someone you love is never easy, even when that person has lived a long and productive life. Yet, it is in the final days that the moments seem sharper and more relevant than ever before. Although we may try to find the perfect words to say to those we love who are dying, it is often the times of silence that have the most impact upon us. The quiet holding of the hand as the loved one rests can bring healing to both.

It is in knowing that one's time with those whom we love is running out that pushes us into a new dimension. For a moment, time seems to stand still as our minds are flooded with memories of joy and laughter and tears. There may be things that need to be finally said to our loved one that did not seem important or perhaps too important to be said before this final crossing over takes place. This is a time in which every moment will be remembered as precious gifts.

This is where we find Jesus at His last Passover Meal, knowing that the time is short in which He has to share the essence of His teaching with those He loves. What lesson did they still need to learn? What example could He give to His disciples that would help them through the days to come?

Perhaps it was the memory of the argument between His disciples over who would be greatest in His kingdom that led Jesus to wash His disciples' feet? For those who do not recall this incidence, let us reminisce for a few moments. In the gospel of Mark, chapter five beginning with verse thirty-three, we read the following:

***“Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last and servant of all.’”***

Perhaps it was this memory that prompted Jesus to remove his outer garment, tie a towel around him and begin washing His disciples' feet. By taking on the role of a servant, Jesus personified the lesson of servant-hood that He had tried so hard to teach His followers. The reaction of shock by Peter lets us know that the disciples had failed in learning this very important lesson of the true meaning of love. True love is when we allow ourselves to submit to another for the sake of the one we love. It is not an act done in protest or anger; instead, it is an act of submission that comes from the heart.

When Jesus washes His disciples' feet, He is saying to them in not just words, but by actions that He is willing to submit to His followers and take care of even their most menial needs. It is an act of love that precedes His ultimate act of submission to death by the cross.

Instead of arguing with one another, Jesus wants His disciples to be attentive to one another's needs and to submit to one another. This is what He means when He tells them, ***“Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord---and you are right, for that is what I am. 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 is only in serving one another that we can love one another as Christ loves us. This is the lesson that Jesus wanted His disciples to understand before He left them. Unless they were willing to submit to one another, there would be no hope for the future of the church.

This lesson of Christ like love is still very important for the future of the Body of Christ. Only when the members of the Body of Christ are willing to submit to one another in love for one another can there be healing. For this is the key to living a Christ filled life. It is having the will to knowingly submit our own preferences for the sake of others. This goes against the very essence of being human.

Our humanness wants to fulfill its own desires no matter what the cost is for others. We are selfish from the moment we are born and want our own way. Yet, when we leave this world we will have to answer to the One who gave away all He had for our sake. We will have to face the Master who became a Servant to teach us how to love one another. We will have to kneel before the One who knelt at the feet of His own disciples to teach us the way of humility.

In the last few days that we spent with my mother-in-law, it became difficult at times for her to suck liquid through a straw. To help her to quench her thirst, we would fill the straw with the liquid and let it flow into her mouth. This helped her in her weakened state to continue to receive liquids. While watching my husband gently help his mother in this way, I realized that the reversal of roles had taken place. Like a mother bird feeding its young, my husband was feeding his mother. In an act of Christ like love, my husband was submitting to his mother in a new way.

The submissive love that Jesus was trying to teach His disciples can be summed up in these words from the chorus, "Brother let me be your servant":

***"Brother let me be your servant,  
Let me be like Christ to you.  
Pray that I might have the grace  
To let you be my servant too.  
We are on a pilgrim's journey.  
We are brothers on the road  
We are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.***

***I will hold the Christ-light for you,  
in the nighttime of your fear.  
I will hold my hand out to you.  
Speak the peace you so long to hear.***

***I will weep when you are weeping.  
When you laugh, I will laugh with you.  
I will share your joy and sorrow,  
till we've seen this journey through.  
Brother let me be your servant.  
Let me be as Christ to you.  
Pray that I might have the grace  
to let you be my servant, too.  
(by Maranatha)***