

“Live Like You Were Dying”
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Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35
May 2, 2010

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

One of the most popular country tunes of the last decade is Tim McGraw’s Live Like You Were Dying. It tells of a man who has heard bad news from the Doctor and shares it with a friend:

I asked him when it sank in,
That this might really be the real end?
How’s it hit you when you get that kind of news?
Man whatcha do?

An' he said: "I went sky diving, I went rocky mountain climbing,
"I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Man Chu.
"And I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter,
"And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying."
An' he said: "Some day, I hope you get the chance,
"To live like you were dyin'."

Today’s Gospel is a slice of conversation from the last hours Jesus spends with His disciples here on earth. He isn’t sky diving – the mountain climb to come would be after a cruel beating and once there He’d hang on the cross He was nailed to until death. The discourse John shares is from the Last Supper that had begun in a most unusual manner as Jesus begins His last hours washing feet.

Washing feet was the most humble task in a household. The Jewish people who could afford servants had the lowliest one do this dirty duty. Luke tells us that just prior to this scene the disciples had been arguing about who was greatest among them. Any of them would have washed Jesus’ feet – they were His disciples and He was above them. They would, none of them, have washed each other’s feet – peers didn’t do that. If you did that you were admitting the other person was above you. And here is Jesus – the Christ – the Messiah long awaited – the one they called Lord with a basin of water and a towel around His waist washing their feet.

After a long day of trekking through the streets there was no telling what a person might have stepped in. There were dogs everywhere, refuse in the streets – washing feet meant getting close to everything filthy and unappealing. It was truly a kindness to the guests whose feet would be cleansed from dirt and muck, dried, and rubbed with scented oil before you reclined on pillows around the low tables for food. But it is not the least of the servants or the worst man of

the bunch washing feet on this night before His death but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords getting up close and personally involved with the refuse & filth of His fickle and fighting for position followers who takes on the task of the lowest servant just as Isaiah had foretold.

What a metaphor for Jesus' entire time among us. The Lord of Glory leaving the holiness and perfection of heaven to deal with our lost and broken condition so that we might be cleansed for eternity, stand before God righteous and holy, pure, renewed and filled with new life – our lives then lived out as a fragrant offering of praise marked by love – known to others for love that is a reflection of our great God who loved/loves us and sent His Son for us.

Here is a love so amazing, so Divine it reaches out even to those who reject it! Think of it: Judas had his feet washed that night. Knowing what was in his heart – betrayal, hatred, greed – Jesus still washes the feet of Judas. Oh how stingy we are with our love in comparison – how reluctant to love without some assurance of reward, repayment, return for the investment. How unwilling, even to share love with those God has placed in our lives: spouses, colleagues, children, friends and others. How tragic the list of those to whom we need to “give the forgiveness we’ve been denying.”

It truly takes some getting used to understanding God's love is for all and that we are in service to all. Peter and the followers of Jesus in our lesson from Acts were astounded at how universal this washing, this cleansing had become. It took a vision to turn Peter's eyes beyond his own community of Judaism to the Gentile world. How he must have trembled speaking of Jesus for the first time in a place that he'd been taught was filthy, disgusting, and beyond God's scope of grace and then,

“... as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning... If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?”

Oh, the naysayers were silenced that day and praised God that even the Gentiles were given “the repentance that leads to life.” Cleansing, renewal – it comes through repentance – turning from sin and by grace turning to God who died for all and throughout all of His days – to the very end – shared and showed love.

This past week in Milwaukee considering these texts and spending precious hours with my mother I couldn't help but think of all the washing, all the service her hands have done as a wife and mother to 4, teacher of little children, labor and delivery nurse who was part of the birth of hundreds of babies – and did emergency baptisms for many who were dying at Lutheran Hospital in Milwaukee where she worked. I was rather amused to hear my sister say, “When I was little I always wanted veiny hands like Mom's.” You see, Mom would always say, “I have such ugly hands. They are so big and full of veins. Your sister has such pretty hands. Rings look beautiful on her fingers. I love to watch her hands when she's playing the piano.” Now my sister's hands, while still small and graceful, have the veins of service through long years for her

husband and children and the hundreds of babies she has helped place in adoptive homes. Wrinkles and veins come with the wisdom garnered from meaningful service – a small price to pay!

Today we have with us the special presence of our Seniors whose hands have been in service in God's Kingdom for so many years – who are still serving, loving, sharing the wisdom of their years and God's goodness and grace in witness to Jesus. What a blessing you are to all of us here in the family of faith at Jehovah! What a privilege to honor you in this small way, today, in thanksgiving for your faithfulness. What a wonderful reason to have another meal of celebration following the feast we will share here at the Lord's Table!

One day we will be in God's presence where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. "There, death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more..." I admit there are times when I long for that. I know my father did. He's been in heaven more than 30 years. His last years he talked about it all the time and of his great desire to be there. He had a great desire for others to be there with him as well and loved to talk to people about Jesus. My Mom's focus on heaven was somewhat different throughout her 98 years. Focused on life in the here and now she lives in the present, looks a work that can be done. Her life-verses from Scripture have always been, "Jesus died for all that they who live should not live unto themselves but unto Him who died for them and rose again" as well as, "This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it." I heard her say those verses in the face of loss, hardship and pain. Having lost a newborn she was the nurse who talked to the parents when their baby died. Those big veiny hands have brushed tears from many faces, patted and rubbed the backs of many in sorrow. Always rejoicing, as well – finding the humor in life – sharing joy and love in a positive and uplifting way.

Living like you're dying means there's always more of life to grab on to, love to show and share. And for Christians it means there are always more feet to wash – even the feet of those who hate us. There is always more servant work to be done – and always more than enough goodness and grace, feast and celebration, forgiveness and renewal to fuel our actions clear onto eternity as we follow Jesus!

This past week I was inspired by a praise song that is new to me called, Follow You. I hope these words will inspire you as well.

You live among the least of these.
The weary and the weak.
And it would be a tragedy for me to turn away (from them).
All my needs you have supplied.
When I was dead you gave me life.
So how could I not give it away so freely?

I will follow you into the homes of the broken

Follow you into the world
Meet the needs of the poor and the needy.
Follow You into the world.

Use my hands. Use my feet to make Your kingdom come.
To the corners of the earth until Your work is done.

I'll follow you into the homes of the broken.
I'll follow you into the world.
Meet the needs for the poor and the needy.
I'll follow you into the world.

As Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." AMEN

Now may our loving God pour into our hearts His most excellent love so that we may know and make known His goodness, grace and peace!