

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 13:1-17
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 February 25, 2018

KIDS' MESSAGE

See my **Family Circus** cartoon. The little girl is crying because she is having trouble cutting out her paper dolls. Her mom says, "**Ask God to help you do it.**" The little girl replies, "**I did, but I think He's busy workin' with somebody else.**"

1. What kinds of things make you happy?
2. What kinds of things scare/make you afraid?
 - Sickness, parents fighting, someone dies, someone threatens to hurt you, a car accident. . .
3. Does God care about sickness, fighting, kids getting hurt?
4. How does God help so many people in times of trouble?
 - Parents, grandparents, day care providers, school teachers, Sunday school teachers, friends, church members, neighbors, even strangers.
5. Are there enough helpers? The little girl thought God was too busy to help her. Could God use more helpers? Are you God's helper? Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Elaine Bruss has been the "**snack lady**" at **Tiny Tots** for 35 years. The kids she has served were 2-3 years old. To this very day, Elaine can be walking down the street in Aitkin and some 30 something year old adult will walk up to her and say, "**Weren't you the snack lady at Tiny Tots?**"

Jesus knew that **his hour** had come to **depart** from this world and **go to the Father**. **Having loved his own** who were **in the world**, **he loved them to the end.**" (John 13:1) It is Lent. Good Friday is approaching. Jesus will die.

Jesus knew – he literally chose to do all that followed. He knew what was coming, how painful, how terrible, and he did it intentionally, faithfully. . .

His hour – this was all a part of God's great plan for our salvation, our rescue. The **time** had come for Jesus to die.

To depart from this world – Jesus' earthly rescue mission was coming to its climax, to its prophetic fulfillment. . .

Go to the Father – time to head home where the great family reunion awaits all of Jesus’ sisters and brothers. . .

Having loved his own – “**love**,” it’s that “**agape**” stuff, self-giving, undeserved and faithful even in the face of betrayal, denial, rejection, even through shouts of “**crucify**,” **spikes** and **spears** driven into Jesus’ body. . . **Love never ends**.

Who were in the world – that’s us, you and me and those first believers. **We are the ones** that Jesus **loves so deeply and so totally**. And we are the ones Jesus has put into this world to **carry on his rescue mission work**. . .

He loved them to the end – Whose end? Their end? No, Jesus loved them to **his end** here on this earth. For them and for us, this was really just the **beginning of our new life in the Family of God and of our new mission as children of God, followers of Jesus!**

“Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” This is what **Maundy Thursday** is all about for you and for me. On that first Maundy Thursday, Jesus **washed the disciples’ feet** – only slaves were ever expected to do this humble service. Later that evening, Jesus shared bread and wine, **his own “body” and “blood,”** with them. A few hours later he hung dying on a cross.

As Jesus washed their feet, he said, “**So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. . . If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**” There it is then, **our mission call – service** – a mission that “**in the doing**” **brings blessing** both to those who **receive** it and to those who **do it**. . .

Jesus concluded his teaching with these words, “**I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Four times Jesus uses that “**love/agape**” word. It is not the mushy-gushy love we hear so easily thrown around in our cheap and selfish world. Jesus is using the word that calls for **giving yourself away for others**, for strangers, for enemies, for the world! **Jesus’ kind of love calls for dying**.**

Jesus is moving to establish a **radical community of love**, of **self-giving**, of **change**, of **action**, of **life**! Jesus has a **powerful, life-giving love** in mind.

- **The One who said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me” is all about love!**
- **The One who said, “Whatever you do unto the least of these my little ones (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, welcoming the stranger. . .)” is all about love!**
- **The One who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, the humble, the merciful. . .” is all about love!**
- **The One who said that we should forgive one another an infinite number of times is all about love!**
- **The One who said, “Father, forgive them” . . . is all about love!**
- **The One we killed on a cross is all about love!**
- **That One that grave and hell couldn’t hold is all about love!**

Does Jesus Christ live in this place of faith today? Is Jesus, **who is all about love**, moving among us here? Is this a truly **loving/agape place** for people? Is this a **foot-washing** place? Is this an **acceptance place**? Is this a **forgiveness place**, a **healing place**, a **blessing place**? Are followers of Jesus equipped, empowered and sent in service to Jesus and to God’s world from this place?

Is First Lutheran Church a **radical community of love**? On that first Maundy Thursday and to this very day, Jesus commands his followers to live in that way – as a **radical community of love**. **Paid staff** can’t make First Lutheran that way. **Somebody else** can’t make this church that way. If we don’t make much of a difference within and beyond these walls, we aren’t a radical community of love. There won’t be radical love without God’s help. There won’t be radical love without more and more and more children of God speaking, walking and living in loving ways to one another here and to others out there. It won’t be a radical community of Jesus’ love unless we each do what we have been gifted and called to do - In **Jesus’ Name**, to **God’s glory**, and to the **care of the neighbor and world**!

Maybe you have no desire or plans to be a part of a **radical community of God’s love**. **Nicholas Cruz**, in **Parkland, Florida**, age 19, lost his father when he was just a child. He had a history of cutting, slurs and mental illness. His mother died in

November. A school friend convinced his own parents to take Nicholas into their home and family. A few days ago, Nicholas slipped into the high school from which he had been expelled and killed 17 people.

On public radio, I heard a **teacher** from the school. He was also a **local mayor**. This man described how teachers are trained to “**shepherd**” every student in the group. They work so hard to help every student find their niche and fit into their class. There on the radio, this teacher/mayor grieved that he and his fellow teachers had failed to help Nicholas Cruz. “**How did we fail? How did we let this one slip away?**” If Nicholas Cruz lived here, **Elaine Bruss would have given him snacks in Tiny Tots**. . .

When the shooting started, one **teacher/coach** jumped in front of the shooter to shield students from being hit. The teacher was killed. **Other teachers** grabbed students, pulled them into their classrooms and hid them in closets. **Law enforcement and medical people** also risked their lives to stop the shooter and rescue the students. Now **grief counselors** have come to the high school to assist the students in dealing with their wicked trauma. A **Lutheran Care Ministry** has brought “**comfort dogs**” to renew the students’ hearts. These dogs go to every such shooting disaster, **18 so far in 2018**. By the next day, hundreds of people, **led by students**, gathered on the **football field** to cry out against what happened and to demand that our government leaders **do something about mental health, about guns – do something** so that such horrendous mass murders might **not be everyday occurrences** in our land. The students asked:

- Why can people with mental illness purchase guns?
- Why can people on terrorist watch lists buy guns?
- Why are “bump stalks” allowed to turn semi-automatic guns into automatic killing machines?
- Why don’t we have background checks for every gun sold?
- Why are assault rifles legal for any 18 year old to purchase?
- Why does anyone need an assault rifle?
- Why can’t our leaders even have an **honest debate about what to do?**

This amazing United States of America, land of the free, home of the brave, has a rich and proud **tradition of being able to solve most every problem** that has

arisen throughout our history. We **argue**. We **debate**. We **listen**. We **pray**. We treat each other **respectfully**. We **work together**. We **compromise**. We **move forward** to a better place. Is that not the United States you know and love?

“Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (John 13:1) **Jesus kept on loving people even as his blood poured out onto the ground.** Then he said, **“I need you to wash some feet, to serve, to love. . .”**

I heard a **Twin Cities mom** on public radio. She said she instructed her kindergartener, in case of a school shooting, to **“Make yourself as small as possible and hide.”** She told her 11 year old, **“Don’t be a hero. Don’t try to help your friends. Save yourself.”** The fifth grader replied, **“Well, Mom, I think we should have First Aid Kits in our backpacks so we can try to stop the bleeding like we learned in Cub Scouts.”** **Jesus came to stop the bleeding too.**

And so did **Elaine Bruss** and all the Tiny Tots leaders, and **Joanne Oaks**, Lutheran Social Services foster grandparent at Rippleside Elementary School, **Marcy Mateyka** and her crew of Sunday School teachers, **Kim Jones** and her VBS Team, **Dori McMillan** and her Milestones Team, **Paul Kellerman** and his Camp Team, **Jenni Cline** and her Confirmation Team, **Jill and Jennifer** and the High School Praise Band, **Phil Martin** and the High School Bible Study, **Kristine and David** and the High School Youth Group, **John and Sari** and the Soup Kitchen Team, **Ruth Nelson** and the Food Shelf Team, **Sue Landsverk** and the Community Meal Team and **Ardith Kane** and the Quilting/Prayer Shawl Team. . . Our list goes on, on, and on. . . Last Wednesday, **students in Florida** petitioned our leaders to **do something to stop the killing**. That same night, **students in Aitkin** knelt before this altar and **prayed for God to help us** with that. **Washing feet.** . . **With Jesus.**

Jesus, on the night before he died on the cross, said, **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** Maybe if there had been a few more Tiny Tots grandmas in Nicholas Cruz’s life, there wouldn’t have been a Parkland school massacre. . . **Help us to love each other like you love us, Jesus.** Amen.

