

**April 13, 2017, at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. Maundy Thursday Evening Worship. 7:00PM. Stripping of the Altar.**

**“Do you understand what I have just done to you? He asked. ‘You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet.’ You, then, should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.”**

Nowhere in the words of Jesus do I see an opening that he is merely expressing an opinion. This is a **directive**.

***“So that you will do just what I have done for you.”***

Pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote a commentary on Matthew 16:24, where Jesus also explains what it means to follow him:

***“If you want to become my follower, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.”***

**“The Christian faith is not a set of opinions about Jesus.  
It is a life of following him, practicing his self-giving love.  
To follow Jesus is to enter the suffering of the world.  
The cross is not an annoyance, a burden, an injustice.  
Your “cross to bear” is not the overbearing aunt.  
It is the fear of the abused, the tears of the deported,  
the rage of the dismissed, the weariness of the exploited,  
the despair of the condemned, the loneliness of the forgotten.  
It is bearing in your heart—perhaps even in your flesh—  
the suffering of others, and their infinite worth,  
to act for the sake of grace in their lives,  
to be in solidarity with the poor for the sake of justice.  
It is to embody God's grace amidst human failings.  
It is your grateful choice to suffer for the sake of love.**

**Lay down the sword of doctrines and arguments,  
the shield of your separate self, your privileged security,**

**and take up the cross of Christ,  
the risk and vulnerability of the Gospel,  
the courage to confront injustice and embody healing,  
the love of God, weak, naked and tender in this world,  
and more powerful than a hundred armies.”**

If you were here last Sunday you may remember that I referenced this power when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a beast of burden, a donkey rather than a war horse befitting a powerful king.

This was a direct and deliberate confrontation to show the Jewish religious establishment and the mighty Roman Empire that non-violence is more powerful than, as **Pastor Steve** wrote, **“a hundred armies.”**

Apparently, judging from our behavior and warring madness as seen by the horrific events in **Syria** with the deliberate targeting of innocent fellow citizens including babies and children who then die a most horrific and slow death, it is a lesson we have yet to learn.

**Iraqi** cities like **Aleppo** are reduced to lifeless rubble, millions have fled to escape the carnage only to die on the journey. It is as if a virus of insanity has entered our minds and caused us to be blind to history's lessons that we continue to repeat again, and again and again, and again.

In a relatively short time in the annals of history, we have gone from what humankind once called **“The War to End All Wars,”** to the one during which I was conceived and born, the second great world war, and 22 years later the one I served in which was yet another **unwinnable war**, because even the language we use betrays our ignorance, as if war was a competitive sport like football.

That kind of thinking is also a kind of **madness**. There are no **winners** in war, only **losers** on every side. I have found myself in conversation with many of you about the troubling times we live in, the political chaos not only in **Washington DC**, but around the world.

And I find that I am desperate for the presence of this faith community in my life, not as a religious escape, but as a way of finding sanity in the midst of madness. We need the message that once changed to world, the message of peace and

justice that is at the heart of Maundy Thursday. If we wash one another's feet, if we love and serve one another, if we receive the stranger and embrace those who are thirsty, hungry and naked, we will have no time or stomach for war.

That's why we worship, and that's why we gather here to be reminded of the power of love over hate, light over darkness, and life over death!

I recently received a **Lenten Litany** from my dear friend the **Rev. Greg Johnson** in New York. It is written by Joyce Rupp, from ***Out of the Ordinary***, and is perfect for this evening and is a reminder of the message that ultimately the cross whose shadow is cast over all of us, is a message of **love**.

I will read the petitions and when I hesitate at the end of each petition, your response is:

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When loved ones experience pain and suffering...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When illness, aging, or chronic pain diminish our joy...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When doubts arise and confusion fills our minds...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When others fail us, or refuse to forgive us for our failings...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When we stumble and stray from the path of goodness...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When death separates us from those we love dearly...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When financial problems threaten our security...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When depression or loneliness returns again and again...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When broken relationships seem unamendable...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When our faith strengthens, and gives us courage...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When the precious gift of life is recognized and appreciated...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When unexpected kindness and caring comes our way...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When optimism stirs our hearts and springtime returns...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When the peace of Christ calms our anxiety, and softens our sadness...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When we realize that our loving presence can make a difference...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

When the joy of Easter permeates our hearts...

**Remind us that your love is with us.**

**AMEN.**

