

Charles St-Onge
Maundy Thursday A
March 24, 2005

What the Church is All About

John 13:1-17, 34

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

D) What is The Church?

Martin Luther once quipped, "Even a seven year old child knows what the Church is." Thanks goodness for that – now if only we could find that child, we'd be all set. What if I asked you – What is the Church? What would you answer?

I ask that question in Adult Instruction class and I usually get a variety of answers:

- 1) The Church is at 628 E. Chester Pike (or anywhere there's a steeple)
- 2) The Church is the Missouri Synod, or ELCA, or the Vatican
- 3) The Church is the place I "get my kid done" when they're born
Or my wedding done
Or my funeral done
- 4) It's one of the clubs I belong to
- 5) It's the thing I do Sundays or Wednesdays or Christmas or Easter

In one of the video games I occasionally play everyday I need to join "clubs" to progress toward the game's goal. I can actually join two churches, and they only get minimally upset. At the one if I belong to the other two. I can also be a protector, and a wiseman, and a guard. Church is just another thing I do (Or at least I tell people I do it).

Is that really what the Church is? Can someone tell me what Church is all about, Charlie Brown?

Tonight, Jesus dresses up like Linus, takes off his coat and tie, puts his security blanket around his waist, and says, "Let me tell you what Church is all about, Charlie Brown." This is what it is: sheep who listen to and obey their Shepherd. There. That wasn't so hard, was it?

II) How do We Be the Church?

Ah, but it is, isn't it? In what way are we sheep? What does it mean to obey our Shepherd? If you are still wondering what the Church is, you're no different than the Apostles who started the Church. They weren't entirely getting it either. John admits as much in his Gospel. After almost every hint Jesus drops, from Jesus prediction that he would rebuild the "temple" to his predictions of his death and resurrection, John frankly adds, "We didn't get it until Easter."

Jesus knows they don't entirely get it, so this last night before his Passion and Death, He and his Father by their Spirit conceive the Church. The Church is conceived this Maundy Thursday night. The Church is to be shaped in TWO DIMENSIONS: the Sheep must Relate To Their Shepherd, and the Sheep must learn to Relate to each Other. Both are taught TONIGHT, at Jesus' Last Supper.

A) Sheep Relate to Their Shepherd

Their Shepherd gives us his life for the sheep. He gives up his flesh and blood for the life of the world. For he is the Bread of Life. The Shepherd gives up everything he has and gives it to the Church. He takes bread and says "This is my Body." He takes one cup and says, "Drink from this Cup – It's my Blood."

If go to Jesus and say, "How do I connect myself with you?" "How do I show myself to be your disciple?" "What do I need to do to show you are MY SHEPHERD?" I know what he will answer: HAVE COMMUNION WITH ME. COMMUNION is just the Latin word for "Fellowship." To have FELLOWSHIP with the Lord means to have COMMUNION with him, to take the body he offers and the blood he offers for forgiveness,

That's why Jesus says: "Do THIS in remembrance of me"

B) Sheep Are in the SAME FLOCK

But that's NOT the end of the story of the Church. I believe that's why JOHN had to write his OWN ACCOUNT. People got so focused on their relationship with the SHEPHERD, they FORGOT about their FELLOW SHEEP! Jesus didn't just give the LORD'S SUPPER at the LAST SUPPER. He WASHED his disciples feet

THEIR FEET:

Of course you all take a bath or shower before going out, right?

You get dressed up if you're invited out for dinner

The disciples would have done the same thing before the Sabbath

But on your way to your guest, your FEET STILL GET DIRTY

So a SLAVE WOULD WASH YOUR FEET,
So you'd be COMPLETELY clean

OUR FEET:

In the same way, we've been baptized clean – born again of water and Spirit. But we live in a dirty world. And our spiritual feet get dirty just by living in it. So what do we do, we sheep? We wash one another's feet. We forgive each other, support each other, teach and learn from each other. We find new ways to be Christ in the World - TOGETHER

To serve our neighbor by giving up what God has given us, so that others might be able to eat or learn.

That's why we support Loaves and Fishes and Orphan Grain Train
To build a school and medical center in a wartorn country in Africa like Liberia
Supporting people we may never meet on this earth
So that that we might spend eternity with them in the next

But whatever we do, we do it TOGETHER. You can't wash your friend's foot if you're not HERE.

III) Let's Be the Church

What the World needs now, more than ever, is
Not more laws
More government,
More police or fire-fighters,
Or more money, fame and power

What the world needs more than ever is
for the Church to be the Church again.

Not just some group of people worshipping in some building,
Or some group of do-gooders

But SHEEP being FED regularly by their SHEPHERD,
PRAYING TO HIM and THROUGH HIM for the world
AND coming together to WASH one another's feet
And calling others to do the SAME

SHEEP following their LORD'S LAST COMMAND:
To "LOVE ONE ANOTHER, as HE HAS LOVED US."

Tomorrow, we will hear the FULL MEASURE OF HIS LOVE FOR US.
Let us now rejoice in that love and receive it's fruits.
AMEN.