

**The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa**

Easter, 5C

Acts 11:1-18

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

May 2, 2010

Imagine that you were posing for a picture. Perhaps it is at a family gathering... a wedding, a birthday, a graduation. Or, if not a family gathering, maybe a gathering for work, or a club. There you all are, gathered together--everyone smiling, everyone looking their best, eyes focused on the camera. Years later perhaps, at some other gathering, or maybe when you come across the picture while you are alone, you will look at the picture and remember the people. Every one in the picture might be smiling, but behind the smiles, everyone has their own story. You might remember how Aunt Sue, couldn't stand cousin Fred. And that two of the in laws always had something sarcastic to say about everything. Remember how tense every one was when those two were in the same room? Remember how critical he used to be? If it was a picture from where you work, you might remember that the CEO was such a tyrant, or that the accountant was incompetent, or how the person in charge of customer relations couldn't get along with anyone.

Pictures are wonderful reminders of events that have to do with family, or teams or work. But, the picture only tells part of the story.

One of the most famous picture, or portrait of any gathering is that of the Last Supper of Jesus. It is probably the most painted meal in the history of the world Google in famous, modern, or other last supper paintings and you will get more than a million possible hits. Most of us have seen copies of DaVinci's famous painting, and each of us has our own favorite I am sure. And many of us have heard the joke about Jesus saying something to the effect of: everyone on this side of the table.

Most of the pictures present the last supper as a time of great warmth and intimacy. Jesus washing his disciples feet. Jesus giving his body and blood to his disciples in the bread and the wine. But, like all portraits, this is not the entire story. Like the portraits of family or work behind the smiles, behind the image of intimacy and warmth, everyone has their own story. Judas of course has the money bag in front of him, he is about to betray Jesus. But there are other issues as well. There is jealousy perhaps that its always John, the beloved disciple, and Peter who sit closest to Jesus. There is the tension that exists between Simon the zealot who hated the Roman empire and Matthew who collected taxes for Rome. And of course there is the tension that is always present in groups that travel together, spend so much time together. Everyone has issues, right? Some think that they work harder than the others, while others think they are never listened to. Everyone has annoying habits, different agendas, different opinions. All of these tensions are only magnified as there is the awareness that has grown around the table that things are coming to a head. The authorities are getting closer, the plots are thickening, the noose is getting tighter. The paintings capture the warmth and the intimacy, but the truth is that the last supper take place in an atmosphere of fear, betrayal and tension.

On that night of such tension, Jesus speaks of glory. On that night of such fear, Jesus speaks of love. On the night of such tension Jesus acts as a servant, washing the feet of his followers. On the night of such tension Jesus commands his followers to do likewise.

Moments of intimacy, moments of warmth, moments when every one is smiling are times of love. But the deepest love, the most powerful love is that which is enacted in the mundane and ordinary. The

deepest love is enacted in the difficult, and perhaps frightening times. Jesus gives his commandment to love on the night before his followers will flee from him. On the night before one of those closest to him denies him, the night before one who had been with him the longest denies he knows him. Jesus gives his commandment to love on the night before he dies. Jesus gives his commandment to love, and the night before his love for his Creator, his love for all creation took him to the cross. That is love. To die for one's beloved. That love is true glory. That love has the power to overcome death. That love has the power to make all things new. That love has the power to give birth to a new earth. That love is the way, and the truth. That love leads to eternal life.

Now imagine another portrait. It is a portrait not from another place, not of another people. It is a portrait of us. It is a portrait of us at the table of the Eucharist. At the table we gather. At the table there is warmth and intimacy as we reach out to receive the body and blood of Jesus in the bread and wine. But the warmth and intimacy only tell part of the story.

With the warmth and intimacy there are all sorts of emotions. At the table, in the portrait, are those who are annoyed. They are annoyed by many things: by the sermon, by the church, that they have to be here, that someone is in their seat, by their parents, by their husband, wife or partner, by their children, someone else's children, by the music, by the person in the next pew. There is lots to be annoyed with. At the table, in the portrait are those who are afraid. Afraid for their health, their jobs, their children, their marriage, afraid of life itself. There is much to be afraid of. At this table are those who hold widely differing opinions about all things imaginable. In this portrait are those who admire the president and those who do not. There are those who applaud the immigration bill and those who deplore it, there are those who support the war and those who oppose it. At the table are the faithful and the faithless, the certain and the doubting, the clean and the unclean, the worthy and the unworthy, the saints and the sinners. At the table are people who have their own agendas, their own opinions, their own issues, their own baggage, their own successes and failures, their own hopes, and dreams.

At this table of this Eucharist, as at the table of the last supper, Jesus commands us to love as he loved and to serve as he served. At this table Jesus tells us that true glory is found in acting with love toward those who are difficult to love, and at times when it is difficult to love. From this table Jesus sends us to serve the world in love. From this table Jesus sends us forth in the power of the spirit to make all things to. From this table Jesus sends us forth, that by the power of the spirit, we might bring to birth God's new heaven and God's new earth.

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