

Today's Gospel verse comes from one of the most touching and fascinating stories in the Bible. It was evening of Jesus' betrayal, and Jesus gathered his disciples to eat the Passover meal, which was to commemorate the Jewish exodus out of Egypt. Jesus knows that shortly after he'll be arrested and so he's taking his time in this very intimate moment with his disciples and he gives them something like his last words of wisdom and encouragement. But first he wraps a towel around his waist and he starts to wash their feet.

Now this was a common custom in the orient. People usually wore sandals and so before they entered the tent or a house they would wash their feet, or in the richer households they would have the slave or a servant wash the feet of guests. And so Jesus puts himself into a position of a servant and as he starts to wash his disciples' feet he tells them, "*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.*"

In our stewardship series, we talked about trusting and not worrying; we talked about walking humbly with our God, (pause) but now Jesus brings it all together, through his commandment of love. (pause) We can trust our Lord with everything within us, we can humbly walk with him every day, but if we don't love one another, we're completely missing the point. And I'm not talking just loving your family, and closest friends, but truly loving like Jesus. Unconditionally, in good times and bad times, loving with forgiveness and patience, loving those who are different, who are far, even our enemies. Jesus says, love one another, just as I have loved you. (pause)

When we talk about stewardship we imagine money, but this year I want our stewardship to be about love. For I don't want you to start thinking about how much I need to give so that the ministries of this place can continue, but I want you to start thinking and praying about how much I need to love so that through my life the love of Christ can continue to shine. Jesus could have said to his disciples go now, start collecting a lot of money, build big churches, start many programs, so that the whole world can come and see that you are my disciples. But he didn't do that. Instead he said, "*Love one another, as I have loved you.*" (pause) And as they did, we read they continued to be together and had everything in common, they gave to anyone as he had need. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. That's how the

book of Acts describes the fellowship of believers who grew so rapidly not because they had many programs and ministries, but because they took to heart the words of Jesus to love one another. They literally out-loved everyone else.

My ordination verse was from 2 Cor. 5:14 and it says, *“For Christ’s love urges us on.”* But in Slovak it is translated, *“For Christ’s love binds us together.”* And I love that translation. It binds us together. It was written above the altar in my home church, the church I grew up in. It was a constant reminder for me that I’m loved by God through the love of Christ and that there is nothing in this world that can separate me from this love. But at same time it was reminding me that Christ’s love binds us all together as it urges us to love one another. I chose that verse as my ordination verse for that’s what I want my ministry to be about. That’s what I want my life to be about.

In high school I did a lot of things I’m not proud of, and I struggled a lot as I started to contemplate going into seminary, for I felt unworthy, I didn’t feel I’m good enough. And then at my graduation I talked to Mr. Steffens, he was one of the American missionaries at my school, he knew me well, he knew I was thinking about ministry, and so at the graduation reception I approached him and I guess I kind of wanted to apologize for some of the things that happened, and I said, “Mr. Steffens, I know we did a lot of bad stuff, and I wanted to say I’m sorry.” And before I was able to finish my sentence he looked at me and said, “Drahus, you love people, and that’s what truly matters.” (pause) Through that one comment God let me know that I can do this, I was reminded that it’s all about love. (pause) We do screw up, we are not always patient, we argue, we do all kinds of things, but it is the love that overcomes all these things, the love of Christ that compels us, that binds us together. That’s why Jesus reminded his disciples in his last moments with them of this love.

Today we remember the saints of the church, we remember the ones who have gone before us, we remember their lives, we remember the way God touched our hearts through their love. (pause) At the same time we are reminded that we are all connected to this community of saints, the community that started in the upper room when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. We are reminded that we continue in the legacy of these saints as we share Christ’s love with one another and the world around us. That’s how they’ll see and know that we are disciples of Jesus, that we are one community of saint’s working for the common good, following Jesus together, loving one another. Jesus makes it simple for us, he calls us to love one another—he calls us

into relationships, he calls us into his community where we begin to see that we're loved, that we're cared for, that God provides us with more than enough. May we all be willing to support this community of saints, willing to be a part of it, and especially willing to love one another with the love of Christ, that binds us together.

Amen