

The Action of Love
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

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March 29, 2018

As we approach the end of our Lenten journey in these last days of Holy Week, I find myself going back to the beginning with Ash Wednesday. I remember standing before you at the evening service reeling from the massacre of 17 people at a high school in Parkland Florida. The following Sunday I said I felt called to act. I could no longer sit back and pray and hope that somebody would do something about it. I decided that I would go to a rally or a march – donate money, something. And so I have acted. I have given money to the Sandy Hook Promise foundation, and when the March for Our Lives was organized, I went to New York City with a couple of parishioners and a few priests from our diocese. It was not a good time schedule wise the Saturday before Palm Sunday, but I needed to act in some way and so I got on the train, dealt with taking the subway with all the weekend closures, and marched – well we did a lot of standing around waiting to march, but we did march and it was amazing to act with all those other people who want change to protect our children.

Some have asked me if I think being a part of the march will do any good. I truly believe so. We have the example of the difference marching made in the civil rights movement with Dr. King. I believe the presence of every person who was able to make to any march whether it be 200,000 in DC or 13000 in Morristown NJ made a difference. I also believe that my presence at the march, my action, changed me and how I am in the world. My action in marching took me to a different place from that where I was in my thoughts and prayers.

Jesus knew about the power of action. We saw it in how he turned the tables over in the temple etc. Perhaps one of the MOST powerful actions he performed besides his death on the cross was the one we hear about this evening which was to wash his disciple's feet. It was an action that the disciples did not want. Even servants did not do the job of washing the feet that walked in sandals on dusty dry roads. And yet Jesus picks up a towel and one by one washed their feet and in this action, he showed the disciples the great love he had for them and the love he wanted them to have for one another. Perhaps the action of foot washing was needed, because words were not enough and he did use words – As the Father has loved you etc. This was an action of love – of deep love.

Archbishop Tutu in his book, God has a dream reminds us that “Love is an act of the will, where you act lovingly even if you do not always feel loving. We tend to think of love as a feeling, but it is not. Love is an action.”¹

¹ Tutu, Desmond. God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time (p. 78). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Archbishop Tutu gives a great example of this when it comes to married couples. He wrote, "If married life depended on our feelings for our spouse from moment to moment, very, very few would survive. True love is when you are feeling as dead as a stone and you say to yourself, "This is the one to whom I have committed myself and she has committed herself to me." You do not have a great deal of control over when you feel resentful or irritable, but you can still choose to be loving—to act lovingly"

On the night before he was to die, by washing his disciples feet, Jesus' loved his disciples. And we will do the same here this evening. We will wash one another's feet as an action of love – an action of love we are called to have for one another and as a reminder of the love Jesus has for us.

Maybe you will wash the feet of your child or spouse showing them your love even though you may not feel very loving towards them after the fight you had in your car on your way here. Maybe you will wash the feet of a stranger knowing that this action draws both of you into loving community. Maybe you will wash the feet of a good friend, giving flesh to the bond of support that is between you. Maybe your feet will be washed by someone who you never seem to get along with and you will be reminded how Jesus calls us beyond feeling to action.

The action of love doesn't end with the foot washing. Think of all the other actions of love that will happen this evening in this service – from our sharing the peace to gathering around this table to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Especially think about all those actions of love, you will be called to beyond these doors as you out into the world that so desperately needs your action of love.