



ST BART'S

A Sermon by

The Rev. Matthew J. Moretz, *Associate Rector*

Uncommon Sense

Sermon preached at the six o'clock service, March 24, 2016

Maundy Thursday—Based on John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Peter has common sense. A kind of sense that has helped him to thrive in his world. He had been a successful part of his father's fishing enterprise in Galilee. And now he has proven himself in a new venture, nothing less than the establishment of a new movement in the service of God's Messiah. He is even given a new name as a badge of honor, Petrus, the Rock. He's a leader who knows that there is a solid order to things. And, as a leader, he is often the first to speak up, and because of this, it is his lot repeatedly in the Gospels to be the one to publicly protest when Jesus, his Lord and Master, lives out another kind of order, another kind of movement. One that doesn't rely on common sense, but a disturbing uncommon sense. At the very basic level, Jesus didn't make sense to him.

Take something simple like the practice of foot-washing. Back then, foot-washing was to be done by a slave of the household, or by some child or servant woman—people who were situated on a very particular part of the social order. Even the disciples wouldn't have been expected to wash feet. Like shoe-shining or getting a manicure, they had people for that, didn't they? Just like we have people for that, don't we? Have you thought about all those jobs that are, how do we put it, "beneath you"? Perhaps you don't put it in such stark terms, but I am sure that there are tasks that you have left behind because you have attained a certain status. You don't have to worry about something anymore because others do that now. And I bet, even though it might be the simplest task, like moving a chair, cleaning up a small mess, or picking up a phone, or running an errand that anyone could do, if that task was one that you thought you were above, or shouldn't have had to worry about, because "somebody else" should have taken care of it, I bet that you can think of a small task that still bothers you, still irks you because you had to do it. It wasn't that it was hard, but that it wounded your self-image, your status, the power to delegate that you thought you had. But circumstances proved otherwise, didn't they? And if you can lose your status in such a little thing, what else could you lose? Could you lose your authority? Could you lose your station in life? Could you lose everything?

This is part of Peter's thought process as Jesus removes his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash his disciples' feet. Peter is deeply concerned that if Jesus, his Rabbi, washes his feet, if Jesus has this basic misunderstanding as to how such a basic thing like class works (he is one who is washed, not a washer), how is their movement going to function at all? How will they be taken seriously, when Jesus does what looks like a prank? How could they be trusted? How could they look to Jesus for strength, when he was being so weak?

But Jesus didn't break up this pivotal aspect of the social order to humiliate himself. He did this to show forth a kind of glory that you can't humiliate. He did it to break humiliation's power to scare and control us! He displayed a kind of glory that shines forth not from being above it all, but a glory that shines from below. And it was a glory he wanted to share with his disciples. It wasn't some special power or new status symbol that he was creating. It was something he wanted everyone to do. He wanted everyone to have access to the deep blessing that comes from leaping over the walls between us in love and care. As he said that night: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than

their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

But there are so many who have no interest in this type of blessing. “You will never wash my feet, Lord.” Because if the winners have to wash the loser’s feet, what happens when I become the winner some day? Or what will happen to the patrons I rely on for my daily bread? What will be the point of success if I cannot be a Lord myself or rely on the lordly system? Instead Jesus is a different kind of Lord than this; what Jesus is doing as “Lord” is refashioning what the word “Lord” means.

But he’s not only interested in the labels that we use: Jesus aims to realign all actual relationships, binding them anew with the energy that comes from blessing others no matter who they are. From blessing no matter the occasion or the circumstance. So that we might have access to an eternal spring of meaning and blessing and glory that is revealed by one of the simplest of actions: To wash all, even those who are “beneath” you, and to be washed by all, even those who are “above” you. And not just any kind of washing. The washing of feet, a personal and delicate, perhaps even ticklish, thing to do! Just like people, there are no feet excluded from this love. There are no feet unworthy of being washed. Even Judas’ feet were washed, weren’t they? Look at how even such a thing as unclean feet become an access point to the abundant life of God in our world! Somehow, thanks to God’s illumination, the washing of feet becomes a holy mystery, a sign of our moving from being spectators of Jesus’ life to participating in it, having our share of God’s glory, by sharing a love like this. A love that is betrayed and still loves. A love that is killed and still loves. A love that endures in the lowliest of places. So that, no matter who we are, we might have our share of God’s glory, one that shines from above and shines from below. A glory that makes no sense to Peter at first, but makes so much sense when we take up our towel and wash our neighbor’s feet.