



## ALL SAINTS CHURCH

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

### **Participatory Liberation**

A Meditation by the Rev. J. Edwin Bacon, Jr.

April 9, 2009 – Maundy Thursday

In our newcomer classes here at All Saints we try to communicate that All Saints is not a spectator sport. Rather it is highly participatory.

This emphasis on participatory Christianity actually is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Jesus said that he did not want his disciples to be oppressive – to be dominating – to be dominators – to lord their authority over other people like the authorities of the Roman oppressors occupying 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. Rather, Jesus wanted his disciples to be servants because, Jesus said, He had come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as an instrument of liberating all people from whatever had them held captive or oppressed.

Jesus' primary passion was to awaken God's House of Love – the Kingdom of God and its justice in every human being. JESUS WAS INTERESTED IN EVERY HUMAN BEING BECOMING A TRANSFORMED SELF – FROM ANXIOUS OR PROUD EGOISM TO RADIANT BELOVEDNESS. Jesus did that by calling every person to a sense of worth – not by virtue of their importance OR LACK OF IMPORTANCE in the Empire, and not by virtue of their importance OR LACK OF IMPORTANCE in institutional religion. Jesus called every person to a sense of their worth because each person was AND IS beloved by God.

That's where being a spectator versus being a participant comes in. It was not enough to Jesus' way of thinking to ask people simply to observe him in his acts of service. He called his followers to participate in acts of service THAT REMIND PEOPLE OF THEIR INTRINSIC AND GOD-GIVEN WORTH. It is not enough to receive the news that we are beloved – no matter what the wisdom of the world says about us. We are called to convey to others that they are beloved – and the way that we do that is by serving the belovedness in them.

That is how tonight, Maundy Thursday, plays into the business of being a participant rather than a spectator. The word, "Maundy" comes from the word "command." Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you – that you love one another." Jesus was always finding ways to make love tangible – to put flesh on that commandment – even on the worst night of Jesus' life.

Tonight is the worst night of Jesus' life the night he was betrayed into the hands of the authorities who would hand him over for a torturous execution on a cross. The night his friend,

Peter, denied knowing him. But rather than give himself over to anxious self-concern, Jesus stayed focused on his passion – to serve and nourish the belovedness in every human being and to call his followers to serve and nourish the belovedness in every person we meet.

So, Jesus did two things – he washed his disciples’ feet and then he fed them the Passover meal – the meal of his Jewish tradition which celebrated their deliverance from captivity to liberation.

My friends, my brother and sister participants not spectators, I invite you now into one of the ancient rites of the Christian community. Since Jesus washed the feet of his disciples on the night he was betrayed, Christians throughout the world have on Maundy Thursday washed others’ feet and then, in turn, received the same act of humble service.

While we sing hymns about service and grace, we will wash one another’s feet. If you wish to participate, please come forward to either transept when the ushers lead you to do so. We will guide you to a chair and assist you. First you will sit as someone else washes your feet. You will then kneel before that same chair and, in turn, wash another person’s feet. Then you will return to your pew. On either side, there are certain chairs to make it easier for some of us both to sit and rise, as well as a stool to use as an alternative to kneeling. If physical challenges lead you to prefer to have your hands [or forehead](#) washed instead of your feet, simply indicate that to your brother or sister waiting to wash [you](#).

You may remove your footwear at your pew, or you may wait to remove your footwear at the washing station. If you have difficulty removing your footwear or any other difficulty, please feel free to ask for assistance. We have people trained to assist you tonight.

If you choose not to come forward, please join in the singing of the hymns printed in the liturgy.

Tonight is the night to recall that we are brother and sister servants of Jesus, called to participate in Jesus’ acts of loving and thus liberating service. Jesus taught that strength and growth in the life of God’s House of Love come not by power, domination, or even miracle, but by humble service. It is service that liberates. It is service that makes love tangible. We all need to remember Jesus’ example.