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John 13:3-17  
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## **“The Last But Certainly NOT Least: ~~Acts of Service~~”**

Today, we come to our fifth and final Love Language. Acts of Service. One of my two favorites!

An Act of service, unlike some of the other love languages, often requires planning and preparation, but mostly it requires our time.

And so, in performing an act of service - we sacrifice our time, which, in this day and age, can actually have as much (or even more) value than money. We sacrifice our time in order to do something for someone we care about.

It might be cooking a meal, setting a table, washing dishes, cleaning the bathrooms, taking out the garbage, or even changing the baby's diaper.

We could paint a bedroom, wash a car, mow the lawn, walk the dog.

It might even be laying palm fronds or even our coats in the path of Jesus as he begins his parade into Jerusalem.

(Since it is Palm Sunday, I had to get a Palm Sunday reference in here somewhere!)

When I'm not feeling well and DeLynn not only cooks dinner, but also cleans up (my normal responsibility), I feel loved and taken care of.

When I do that for her – she is grateful, but it is not how she feels loved. Not her love language.

BUT, if I come home early from work (like I did yesterday) just to be with her ... she feels like I really love her! Quality time.

Or if I merely hold her hand during a meeting – like I did last night – she feels loved – physical touch. We had a good day yesterday because I spoke both of DeLynn’s love languages!

One of the love languages that I believe was important to Jesus was Acts of Service – both in what he said and what he did.

Jesus said to his disciples and says to us as well: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (John 13:14-15)

Jesus commands us to show our love for one another, as he did for us, in practical acts of service. He teaches us that our love for one another cannot be only in theory.

At some point, it has to land on the ground, have concrete expression, because that is how God loved us in Jesus Christ.

It is also one way we can let others know how God loved us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the best example for us when it comes to serving one another.

The most powerful example of that was what immediately preceded the Last Supper on the night before he was crucified.

Let me set the scene for you: It is the last night of Jesus' earthly life. Jesus and the 12 disciples are gathered in the Upper Room to share a final meal.

There sat at the entrance of the door to the upper room a basin, a water pitcher, and a towel.

The basin, water pitcher and towel were all used for washing guests' feet after they traveled the dusty, muddy Jerusalem roads.

Of all the tasks that a servant could perform, washing guests' feet was considered the most demeaning.

People traveled by foot – often barefoot, and so their feet were caked with mud and dirt and animal dung when they arrived at people's homes.

So, it was an expected common courtesy for the host to have his servant wash the guest's feet as they entered the house.

But as the disciples entered one by one no one was stationed at the basin, water pitcher, and towel.

There were no servants in their midst to wash their feet, or so they thought, and so they each passed by the basin, the water pitcher and the towel.

It was not their task; it was not their responsibility; it was not their duty.

Lowly servants handled the basin, water pitcher and the towel. And they were not servants. The disciples were more interested in being served.

So, there at the entrance of the door sat a basin, a water pitcher and a towel.

None of the disciples were willing to take on the role of the lowly servant who washes the feet because if one of them did, where would that put him in the pecking order?

At the bottom of the heap.

Remember these are the same disciples who argued over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. These disciples wanted to be on top, be the best, be number one.

They wanted to move from the background to the foreground, from the backstage to center stage, from the back table to the head table, from obscurity to prominence. ...

Well, Jesus walks into that room and through the corner of his eye he sees the basin, the water pitcher, and the towel.

Of course, Jesus could have said, "Hey come on guys. This is my last night before I die – can't one of you wash my feet?"

But, scripture says, "Jesus tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet" (John 13: 3-5).

We would expect Jesus to give orders, "Peter and James, you wash the feet – you are the ones who were suppose to make all the preparations for this room – and if there are no servants to do it – you guys will!

Or he might have said, "Matthew, you haven't done anything in a while – go pick up the basin and towel."

No, instead of giving a lecture, he gives an example. A silent sermon about how to love.

The One who the disciples called the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords takes on the role of the lowliest of servants and gently lifts the feet of each of his disciples.

Then, washes their soiled, sweaty, hard, callused feet. The hands that will be pierced the next day are the same hands that scrub the grime away that night.

Jesus washes the feet of the disciples who will abandon him in his time of greatest need, including Peter who will deny him and Judas who will betray him.

When it came time for Jesus to show the full extent of his love, he picked up the basin, the water pitcher and the towel.

And we are instructed to do likewise.

A wealthy American traveler tells the story of how he was visiting a hospital in Southeast Asia. He entered the hospital just as a young missionary nurse was cleaning the sores of a sick, dirty, elderly man who had been lying in a gutter.

The wealthy man said to the nurse, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars."

She answered quietly and firmly, "Neither would I."

It is the love of Christ that should make us foot washers.

We may not always feel like serving – serving others can be very inconvenient, serving can be messy, we may get our hands dirty in the process, but we serve anyway because God has called us to be servants.

It is very clear to me that there are some of you who are members of this church, for whom Acts of Service is your primary love language.

It is never too much trouble for you to do something if you are asked.

I often hear these words: “If there is anything I can do to help – let me know!”

Act of Service as a real expression of love – and that fills up your love tank.

I think it safe to say then that God finds great excitement and satisfaction when we serve one another well.

From my experience here at Santa Teresa Hills, I can testify to your great acts of service.

In fact, I think acts of service might be your primary love language as a congregation.

I have seen you in action. I have seen how you pull together, in times of celebration and crisis, to express your love through serving others.

I think of how you serve at the Christmas dinner for the homeless, your participation in our food pantry, Feed My Starving Children, Santa Maria urban Ministry ... and the list goes on and on.

And I think of the small ways in which you serve by driving someone to the doctor's office, cooking a meal, holding someone's hand before surgery or while their loved one is dying.

Every church is different. And so not every church is fluent in this particular love language.

Service, though, is one of this congregation's primary love languages And, you all do it well.

But as in everything we do well, we must never let the things we excel in become stumbling blocks to our most primary service – which is, service to God.

To help us in this, I have two cautions for this love language that Santa Teresa Hills speaks so well.

First, we cannot make this our only love language. We need to determine when the moment or the ministry calls for **acts of service**.

In our last two sermons, we heard about Mary and Martha and then about the woman who gifted Jesus by anointing him with an expensive jar of perfume.

In both stories, service was placed secondary to quality time and extravagant gift giving.

In both, Jesus gently, but firmly redirected his disciples' attention to what was being offered in the moment.

Now, I don't think this means that Jesus wants us to choose quality time or gift giving over acts of service across the board, but rather I think Jesus wants us to pay attention to what the moment calls for.

Every person we face in our life or ministry calls for a particular love response. Sometimes expressing love to them calls for affirming or encouraging them.

Sometimes it calls for spending quality time with them. Sometimes giving them a gift. And sometimes it calls for serving them in a practical way.

We need to determine what the moment calls for and then which language best expresses our love to them.

If the language most appropriate for the moment isn't our primary one or isn't a language that comes easy to us, it means we need to practice, just like we would any foreign language.

In doing so, we may feel awkward or slow going at first. But that's okay.

Often the easiest way to make another feel loved is to mirror the very expressions of love which the other shows to us – because often that is their primary love language.



There's a second caution to make about the love language of acts of service. We cannot engage in acts of service without knowing and expressing why we do them.

Do you know someone who would only say the words "I love you" under duress and yet would be the first person on the scene when your toilet clogs?

Now for those who are intuitive enough to figure out that that person's love language is service, that's great.

But many don't get there – ever. Many get frustrated with what they think is avoidance.

Or, worse yet, don't ever come to know that that person truly loves them (and that is the very reason they would be the first person on the scene to fix their toilet)!

We cannot engage in acts of service, as our love language, without knowing and expressing why we do them.

As the church, that means understanding that what we do when we serve is not "social" work but rather, as Mother Teresa always emphasized, it's "religious" work.

That's not to say that God isn't at work in secular organizations or in areas outside of the church.

Rather, it's to say that we serve to express something particular; we serve to express the love of God in Christ.

In other words, it's not just how we serve one another, but also why we serve one another that helps those observing us know who God is and that God is love.

The "why" behind what we do means the difference between the church doing social work or doing religious work in which God is given the glory.

Sometimes we miss the basin, water pitcher and towel. If you missed the basin, water pitcher, and towel when you walked into church this day, I hope that you will see them when you leave.

When we come to be served rather than to serve we miss the basin, water pitcher and towel. When we come to have our needs met, rather than to meet the needs of others, we miss the basin, water pitcher and towel.

I believe that this is a basin, water pitcher and towel kinda church. One of the greatest expressions of our love is to serve to one another.

May God continue to open our eyes to dirty feet and give us a heart to wash them. For at the door of every entrance in life lies a basin, a water pitcher and a towel.

*Amen.*