

Come Together: "Dirty Hands & No regrets"

John 13:1-15 April 17, 2011

- I. "Come together." Yeh! It's about time we get it together.
 - A. During this season of Lent we have been looking at how we come together as spiritual beings, starting with the compassionate matrix we experience in our mother's womb and in the womb of God.

We then moved to the self-identity that was found in a toddlers, "No" to their god like parents.

From here we moved into young childhood when we fashioned concrete images, built idols of God in our attempts to understand God and give order to our world.

That moved us to adolescence when in a perfect storm of adolescent life we smash those idols that were given to us and that we made on our own;

and we begin our search for a God that is not containable.

As we moved into adulthood we found that our task is to be productive and produce something that is meaningful and lasting.

As an adult we begin to experience God as Designer and co-worker.

And today we move into one of the final stages of life.

It is a stage that I suppose for the lucky ones is characterized by retirement, but even if you're still chasing the dollar, it is a time of reflection, remembering and constructing the meaning of one's life.

- B. This is a time in life when one becomes acutely aware that one's accomplishments and productivity and legacy have already for the most part been established -- in the past. You may have 5, 10, 20 productive years still ahead, but in our society, the opportunity to be meaningfully productive is in decline.
- C. This may be depressing for some but researchers actually think that it is one of the reasons that as people get older they get happier as the stress of performing and having to prove oneself and be productive is lessened.
- D. Another reason that researchers think that people get happier as they get older is that --
- well --- they get wiser.
 - 1. In the absence of any debilitating mental issues as you age – you get wiser.
You make wiser decisions.
 - 2. You have more life experience to fall back on to make decisions, but you also have more

experience to judge events in life.

Some event that may seem devastating to a younger person, the older person may have already been there and done that; and they know that life goes on and is not as distressed by those events.

E. But I would like to return to a feature of this stage in life that I already mentioned and that I think has a profound effect upon a person in their elder years and upon one's image of God.

Namely, this is a time of constructing meaning.

II. As one has time and place to look back, this is a time to give meaning to the events of life, and as such, more than any other time in life, I think to those in their wiser years, the image of God as Redeemer is what is most profound.

A. In any stage of life it is true, but especially to those in their wiser years, those who relate to God as Redeemer are more happy and satisfied with their life and they have a sense of the meaningfulness of the life they have lived and are living.

- B. God as redeemer, becomes so important at this stage of life because, as this is a time of reflection and creating the meaning of one's life, it is a time when one can look back and see all they have done; all that they have accomplished and produced. But it is also a time of remembering all the times they may have gotten dirt, or blood, on their hands, the times that they may have come to regret.
- C. Almost exactly 30 years ago I preached my first sermon from a church pulpit. The church was First Plymouth UCC in Englewood and my sermon title was "Dirty Hands." It was inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's play by the same title which was about an assassin and his struggle with self-integrity. One of the lessons that I took away from his play was that you don't get through life and accomplish anything significant without getting your hands dirty or even more to point – without getting your hands bloody.
- D. As I have pointed out in other sermons, even those folks whose intent is to live a saintly life, even they, if they do anything of

significance, end up with unintended consequences that are... well.. evil.

- E. You can be like the first guy in the parable of the talents and bury your talents away and do nothing – play it safe.
But the reality is that if you're going to accomplish anything of significance there will probably be some, shall we say, collateral damage.
- F. Even in our saintly attempts to build the Realm of God, we'll accidentally drop a hammer on someone's head or push our own work or agendas at the detriment of someone else's.
- G. And that is giving us the saintly benefit of the doubt.
- H. Even if we want to do good, the reality is that our very human tendency towards self-interest, self-defense, self-promotion, a.k.a. selfishness, leave the vast majority of us less than saintly.
- I. If you are getting anything of significance done in this world, I promise you, you have some blood on your hands; whether you want to admit it or not.

- J. So by the time you reach the final stages of life, if you don't have bloody hands, then it's probably because you have not risked enough;
you haven't used your God given talents to their greatest extent.
- K. Maybe you pride yourself in not getting your hands dirty, but then you probably didn't get much done either.

III. Given this awareness, let us return to the scripture for today.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,

"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered,

"You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Peter said to him,

"You will never wash my feet."

Jesus answered,

"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Simon Peter said to him,

"Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

Jesus said to him,

"One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet..."

- A. In Jesus day it may have been the feet that got so dirty, walking around in sandals on all those dusty and muddy roads.
- B. But these days, even if you're wearing sandals, you're probably on linoleum, tile, carpet, asphalt or concrete.
- C. What get's literally and metaphorically dirty are one's hands.
- D. It's our hand's that contract and spread disease.

It is with our hands that we work for the good but also with which we accomplish evil.

1. It is with our hands that drive the car that adds to our carbon footprint on the way to the store where with our hands we pay merchants that use less than moral behavior to bring us cheaper goods.
2. It is with our hands that we stole, that we hit someone in anger, that we expressed our anger in a handy salute, that we wrote checks to fund wars we believed to be wrong, that we allegorically planted weeds in the hearts of others and disseminated harmful thoughts.

3. No – we all have blood on our hands.
4. That's why, as Jesus told Peter, it's good on occasion to wash our feet, or more appropriately for us, our hands.

IV. The sacramental action of Jesus washing his disciple's feet, a ritual we will remember this Thursday evening, was, like baptism, a reminder that God is with us.

- A. The water of the basin is the water of the womb of God.
- B. We are washed clean and reminded that we are still soaking in the warm, safe, compassionate waters of God's womb.
- C. It is a reminder that God knows we get dirty.
God knows we've done things that we regret.
- D. The washing is a reminder that there are to be no regrets and that God, our redeemer, will redeem.

V. No Regrets

- A. Yeh, wouldn't it be nice to make it through life with no regrets.

- B. Wouldn't it be nice if we could get through life, like the 3rd person in the parable of the talents, using our talents to accomplish a great deal, and not get our hands dirty, bloody, - having no regrets.
- C. Wouldn't that be nice.
- D. Wouldn't it be nice, if in our less than saintly times; we hadn't over reacted and acted out with so much anger,
if only we hadn't said those things,
if only we knew the pain we were causing we wouldn't have done what we did.
If only we knew – we wouldn't have voted that way.
If only I knew, I would have been paying more attention when I was driving.
If only I knew, I wouldn't have been so self-serving and self-absorbed.
If only I knew, I would have stopped to help.
If only I had loved a little more.
If only I had taken better care of myself.
And the list of regrets can go on, and on, and on...
- E. But wouldn't it be nice if as we look at our lives and give meaning to all the events, good or bad, all the lost opportunities, all the things that could have been;

wouldn't it be nice if we knew that there was something very special in our lives that would redeem our lives so that there were – no regrets.

No need to regret anything.

- F. Wouldn't it be great as we faced the last moments of our life if we knew that there was one who could assure us that there is no reason to regret anything in our lives.
- G. Wouldn't it be great to have a Redeemer; someone to clean it all up – a fixer.
- H. We're jumpin' a bit to next week and the resurrection, but – that's what it's all about. We have a redeemer. What we don't have, are regrets. The resurrection is all about... Clean hands – No regrets.

AMEN