

July 27, 2017

Draw the Circle Wider IV
John 13: 1-17

Namaste

Namaste. God's spirit in me greets God's spirit in you. It's a Sanskrit word that means "I bow." Some know it from yoga classes, or new age encounters. It is in the Hindu tradition.

But it's also a pause.. a recognition that God is our genesis ... God in me and with me is also God in you.. and with you! And that pause **remembers** that.. re-thinks that.

How did I ever come up with *Namaste* for the title and direction for my sermon in our series on ***Draw the Circle Wider?***

We have been talking about our *connectedness* and our connections. And, at the deepest level, it is God who connects us. And the term *Namaste* encapsulates that. If God created us, then there is that part of God in each of us. And when humanness gets in the way of our connecting... that God part ... *does* still connect.

One of the most beautiful stories that illustrates this for me is this one about Jesus in the gospel of John at the Last Supper. In the Christian tradition, we refer to this as *Maundy Thursday*.

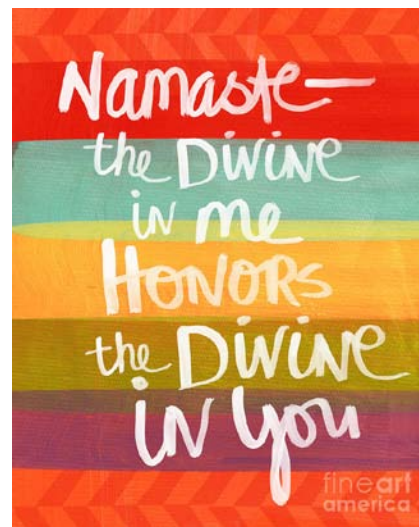
In the other three gospels, the evening of his arrest, we have the story about how Jesus eats probably a Passover dinner with his disciples. It's where our Holy Communion comes from:

Do this in remembrance of me.

It is Jesus' farewell dinner and he wants to leave them with a reframing of their tradition to carry on after he is gone. But in the gospel of John, instead we have this passage. No passing the bread and cup, but rather a foot-washing:

Do THIS in remembrance of me.

Do we?



What was it that Jesus was doing in this gesture? The wording of the passage tells us Jesus knew:

1. He was going to die
2. He knew he would be betrayed by one of his own
3. He knew he would love them to the end
4. He knew he was in God's hands

So what would he **do** on this last night?

What would he **do** to pass on his heart? His legacy?

What could he do to **SHOW** them what they were to do and be?

How would he finish his life showing he had **loved them to the end**. No regrets. All words said.

He would leave them the indelible image of SERVICE.

And so Jesus strips down, gets on his knees and washes each disciple's feet... their dirty, dusty, calloused feet.. a job left for the servants in the home. But we have no record of servants here.

Who would fulfill that role?

The story tells us that **Peter** is furious and uncomfortable. Maybe he was guilty? Why would Jesus, their rabbi, their teacher humiliate himself and do this menial task?

But Jesus is teaching a lesson.

Jesus is painting an image in their minds that will replay itself over and over again: *if he did this to me, what does that say about what I do to you?*

Namaste.

God's presence in me recognizes God's presence in you.

As I read and re-read this passage, a thought occurred to me: **What if this were Jesus' physical way of *forgiving* his friends?**



To each disciple that last night, Jesus was saying *I forgive you ... I love you... I hold nothing back.*

What is it that separates us from each other?

What stands in the way of love and laughter and good, deep conversation?

Is it our perceptions, memories, prejudices, self-doubts, fears.... hurts?

Next Sunday is our INSIDEOUT Sunday. We go out to serve. We do this because we passionately believe that SERVICE and selfless giving is at the heart of who we are as Christians... as Jesus followers.. to selflessly give to others to make their lives better.

Namaste.

We do this because we believe Jesus showed us this way of service. That no one is better than another because of life circumstances. That God loves all of us equally.. that we are siblings: brothers and sisters.

But what is our prototype for this? I believe it is *this* story .. this painting of Jesus. First comes service to each other. First comes humility to each other. We learn to serve others by serving **each** other. And we learn to serve each other because Jesus first got down on his knees to serve His disciples.. the very ones who would betray him and desert him.. and he knew it!



We go out to serve next Sunday... a week from today. But just like Jesus showed his disciples: we have to learn *how to serve* each other first. We have to learn how to forgive each other... to strip away the barriers ... that dirt which the road of life has encrusted on us.

As the song we sang at prayer time reminds us: “.. **loving puts us on our knees.**” We need to learn that first *here*... in community... to each other.

One of my favorite theologians is **Guy Adelott**. We have great discussions, precisely because we see important issues from different vantage points. Guy and I talk about music in this church and about the wide divergence of opinion and heart-felt-sentiment. We talk about the seemingly irreconcilable differences between those who want the easy singing/easy listening music, and those who want the classical music that has survived the ages.

We talked about the opinions that surfaced at **Joel's Café**.. the gathering where we sat down in small groups to talk about our church .. what works, what doesn't .. and what we would like to see. Again... widely divergent opinions especially around music.

And this week Guy said something that struck me as very profound: that he wished people in our church could phrase their opinions thusly:

I don't like your style of music (or theology), but I love you!

I may not agree with you..

I may see things so very differently than you do..

but I love you!

That my friends is Christian community.

That is church.

That is what Jesus is doing in his foot-washing:

knowing it was his last night;
knowing these friends; would desert him;
Knowing it was ending badly.

I may not agree with you ...

but I love you..

and I'm going to show you!

That is our lesson.

That is what we need to learn to do with each other, even as we go out to serve the community.

Because *this* is our genesis.. *this* is our family:

I may not agree with you, but I love you.

**The Jesus in me,
recognizes the Jesus in you.**

Namaste.

The gesture for *Namaste* is two hands pressed together at the heart, and the head slightly bowed. It's a physical gesture as well as a spoken word. ##

What was Jesus on his knees to? Was it to the Holy in each of them?

C.S. Lewis wrote about the divine in all human beings. ("The Weight of Glory")

***"There are no ordinary people.
You have never talked
to a mere mortal."***



Where else in the gospels do we have a story about washing feet?

Remember the women
in each gospel
who washed Jesus' feet
with perfume and tears?

In **Matthew** (Mtt 26: 6-13), a woman comes with a jar of expensive oil on to put on his head as preparation for burial.



In **Mark** (Mark 14: 3-9), a woman pours the perfume on Jesus' head as preparation for burial.

In **Luke** (Luke 7: 36-50), a woman washes Jesus' feet with tears and then pours the perfume on him.

In **John** (John 12: 1-9), Mary (Mary & Martha), poured the expensive oil/perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped it with her hair.

In eastern theology, it is taught that it is at the *feet* of the divine that one receives *forgiveness*. That seems to be happening in each one of these passages.

And yet (and we almost miss it), Jesus' last act is to be at the feet of each of his disciples.

What was he showing them?
What did he recognize in them?
What is he showing us?



Loving divinely **puts us on our knees** to each other.

God's Holy spirit in me
reaches out to God's Holy spirit in you.

Amen.

Preached by the Rev. Pamela Nelson-Munson at Eugene's First United Methodist Church.