

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

I have a story that I would like to share with you.

"A well known speaker started his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?"

Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this." He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air.

"Well," he replied, "What if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty.

"Now who still wants it?" Still the hands went into the air.

"My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God's eyes. To Him, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to Him."

For the majority of us, when we hear the words, Maundy Thursday, the first image that comes to mind is bare feet and towels and water. Yes, washing of the feet is an aspect of this night.

The name for this night. "Maundy" is a medieval English form of the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning "commandment"; and it refers to the following: "'Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'"

But before we can truly love another, something else must happen first. Listen to verses 30 and 31 from the twelve chapter of Mark. "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

Before we can go in peace to love and serve the Lord, we must be at peace; we must love ourselves first. This notion does not set well with many Christians because it sounds egotistical. I have had people come to me and suggest that loving oneself is not Christian. The definition for "egotistical" is "excessively conceited or absorbed in oneself; self-centered". When Jesus talks about loving ourselves, this is not what he is talking about. This is what he is referring to: (3 John 1:2) – "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it

goes well with your soul.” And (1 Cor. 3:16) “Do you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you?”.

God loves us regardless of our flaws and creases; then, how can we feel any less different about ourselves?

A case in point. I am going to call her Jane. She arrived at hospice from a neighboring county. No relatives but a few friends. Jane had been in abusive relationships; she had a hard and damaged life. Jane talked slowly and carefully and avoided talking about spiritual matters. After the third or fourth visit to her room, I broached the subject of prayer. Her response was that “I am not much on prayer”. And considering her life, the act of praying probably seemed fruitless and she saw herself unworthy of God’s love.

Overtime Jane came to realize that God loves her, blemishes and all. And that she was worthy of love and more importantly it was OK loving herself.

Listen to what Paul says and really listen with yourself in mind: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, love always trusts, love always hopes, love always perseveres.”

So, as we go out in peace to love and serve the Lord, it behooves us to check ourselves out first. Make sure that in the passing out the love to our neighbor that we do not forget ourselves. Frederick Buechner puts it this way: “...pay mind to your own life, your own health and wholeness, both for your own sake and ultimately for the sake of those you love too. Take care of yourself so you can take care of them. A bleeding heart is of no help if it bleeds to death.”

Let us pray. This is a prayer from the *Iona Community Worship Book*.

*You keep us waiting.
You, the God of all time,
Want us to wait for the right time in which to discover
Who we are, where we must go,
Who will be with us, and what we must do.
So, thank you...for the waiting time.
You keep us looking.
You, the God of all space,
Want us to look in the right and wrong places for signs of hope,
For people who are hopeless,
For visions of a better world that will appear among the disappointments of the world
we know.
So, thank you...for the looking time.
You keep us loving.
You, the God whose name is love,
Want us to be like you –
To love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable;
To love without jealousy or design or threat,*

*And most difficult of all, to love ourselves.
So, thank you...for the loving time.
And in all this you keep us,
Through hard questions with no easy answers;
Through failing where we hoped to succeed and making an impact when we felt useless;
Through the patience and the dreams and the love of others;
And through Jesus Christ and his Spirit, you keep us.
Amen*