

### **John 13:1-17**

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 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, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.' After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

### **“How Do You Do A Bad Job?”**

**Rev. Charles Schuster**

**September 6, 2009**

We all have a job. Sadly, some of are unemployed. Some of us are underpaid and some of us are overworked, but we all have a job. Some of us are retired, but we are not without work, because we all have a job. We don't always know what our job is. We think it is one thing, and it turns out it's something else. Two weeks ago, for example, I thought my job was to preach. I am a preacher. Preachers preach sermons, and I did, 20 minutes to raise the dead or awaken the sleepers. I thought it was a pretty good sermon, I mean, I grade them, you know. It got a C+. It was something about how we gander at the grandeur and how we gaze at the glitter, in the macrocosm and the microcosm, there is God. I think I got a little caught up in the poetry of alliteration, but that's okay, I'm I preacher, and two weeks ago my job was to preach, I thought.

But that really wasn't my job that day. After the services, I was selected to sit on the metal seat, looking down at a large 5-foot tank of water at the All-Church Picnic. Little children stood with projectiles, aiming at a target which when struck would send the metal seat into a perpendicular mode, thus thrusting me over my head into cold water. Little children throwing at the target. Sometimes, when they missed, they'd walk up and whack the target with their bony little fists, and the metal seat's perpendicularity repositioned me in the tank. I thought at first, my job was preacher. But this is original sin. And when I get back into the pulpit, I'm going to preach on the dark side of the

human soul, and our innocent children are evil, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, and the picnic was no picnic, it was Eden. For the children who put their preachers in the tank were strutting and bragging and laughing and having fun at our expense. It's good I didn't preach last Sunday, it would have been in the image of Jonathan Edwards "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Time to think. Two weeks to reflect on our children. On God. On preachers who get dunked. And I think I heard it, it was the laughter of the children. Or was it the amusement of the God who loves them? My job was not to preach that week, although I did. My job was to be dunked that Sunday, so the children could see that the church is a fun place, and could see that their preachers are funny people. They did.

You and I have a job to do, and it's a good job in a way. We get to love the people. We get to give the sacrament. Our job is sacramental. It's a privilege. We're priests, and Protestant principle says it's the priesthood of all of us. I've often wondered if the disciples saw that, the last time they were together. It was in the section in John's gospel before, what Rebecca read, when Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave the cup of wine and blessed it and said they should take it in remembrance of him. I wonder if it occurred to them that that was their initiation into the priesthood. How wonderful it is to share the sacrament. It's single point, to love the people. The sacrament has a central message that says, "No matter what, God loves you. No matter how hard life is, God is with you. No matter how alone you may feel, you're part of a community of faith, and will never be denied access to the table. The sacrament is the love of God, and as priests, we get to say it. And all of us are priests, the priesthood of all believers. What a good job that is, to love the people. When we ask members of the church to help us with Communion, we never have trouble finding volunteers, because it is an honor, not a trouble, a privilege, not a burden.

I get to take Communion out into the congregation for the people who have a little trouble getting up to the front of the sanctuary. I never set this up beforehand. I'll find somebody, I will today as well. I'll ask them, "Could you help me?" At first, you can see the kind of hesitation that goes on. "Well, I don't know," and then they do it, and after a while they get kind of the hang of it, and when it's over, I've never had someone who worked with me to take Communion into the congregation who didn't thank me for asking. To love the people, it's a privilege. Jesus showed them how to be priests. He showed them the sacrament, and then in John's Gospel, he showed them service. He took the towel. He washed their feet. He said to them, "You do this; to love the people, is to serve the people." You can't be a priest without being a servant.

Our church has an apartment we didn't now about, and we have tenant. Michael is his name, he's in his twenties, and he's been living on the roof over the parlor of the church. We put a note up there and asked him to relocate. He didn't. Tuesday night at 11:00 we called the police. They brought a fire truck with a ladder, and they took Michael down, and he's in jail. You can't have somebody living on your roof. This coming Tuesday I'm going to go to jail to visit with Michael. It's Reverend Dalke's idea. He was pondering how we're going to, you know, doing everything we can to get young people into the church, and when we finally get one, what do we do? We arrest him. So I'm going to jail Tuesday. I got the appointment set, because I think you would want me to, and I'm not

going to ask Michael, "What were you doing on the roof?" I already know the answer to that. I'm going to ask him if he'd like Communion. I'm going to ask him if there's some way the church could serve him. I'm going to find out if there's something we could do for him, because that's what Open Hearts, Open Doors, Open Minds means, and that's the kind of church this is, and that's the kind of people you are.

This past week, the father and brother of Rachel Scott were in town. They spoke of Rachel's love for people, and how she served people. There's a paper that she wrote while she was in high school, just before she was killed by Klebold and Harris at Columbine High School. She wrote, "I have been told that I trust people too easily, but I find that if you put your trust in people, they won't let you down. I'm sure that my code of life might be different from others', but how do you know that trust and compassion and beauty will not make this world a better places? My code of life may seem like a fantasy, but test it out. See what kind of effect it has on the world. We could, you know. We could start a chain reaction." Isn't it ironic, the last words on the video Klebold and Harris made before the massacre at Columbine, the last words of that video that they made, "We could start a chain reaction." What kind of chain reaction? Rachel's kind, love the people. Serve the people.

Greg Mortenson was in town this week. He said it. He said, the reason there are terrorists in the world is because there's a stronger attachment to death than there is to life. To rid the world of terrorism, we've got to create a world where there is a compelling reason for everyone to choose life. That's our job. It's a good job. We can do it. Love the people. A priest. Start a chain reaction of love and service, to choose life. A good job is the priest's to love. A less than good job, you might say a bad job, is the prophet, to lead. Isaiah was the prophet. He was married to a priest. That speaks volumes there, but that's another sermon. We're looking at 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, there are three writers in Isaiah. Next Sunday it's 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah, then 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah. 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah, his job was to tell people what they didn't want to hear, maybe because there was something that happened in the temple, and he heard God say "Whom shall we send, who will go for us?" and some men said "Here am I, send me" and then God said, "These are dull-witted people, they're not going to hear you," and Isaiah said, "How long do I have to tell them?" and God said, "Till the towns are in ruins, they might not listen." Isaiah, before the exile, tried to warn the people. Isaiah before the exile, in the darkest time, tried to tell them. He said, "Don't lie to each other. Don't call evil good, and don't call good evil, and don't put darkness to light, and don't think that light is darkness. Woe to you whose wisdom is in your own eyes." Isaiah, chapter 1 through 39, the prophet. It's a bad job.

Debbie Ford has written a book called *Why Good People Do Bad Things*, and in that book she says, "My goal is to help people understand that one of the deepest of our pains arises from our primal split between our best selves and our less-than-good selves, and I want to interrupt the internal mechanisms that cause us to turn our backs on ourselves, to ignore our intuitions, to inappropriately cross boundaries, and to give our power away to another person, or to impulses that lead us down the road to nowhere." Sometimes we can see it in others better than we can see it in ourselves, and the prophet is one who has to say it. The prophet has to speak it, to lead the people, that's the hardest thing to do, to say

what needs to be said, even if they do not want to hear it, and even if they may not be listening.

Judith Viorst has written a book entitled *Forever Fifty, and Other Negotiations*. In her book, she ponders what she would say to her husband. "On the way home with my husband from a dinner party, I thought I'd very tactfully point out, 'You shouldn't interrupt. You shouldn't talk with your hands. And when discussing politics, don't shout. And you shouldn't tell that story that you told, while people were eating. And you shouldn't ever tell that joke that you told, ever again in your lifetime. And you shouldn't have said what you said about the terrible lady in red, because she happens to be the person you were talking to's wife. And you didn't need to eat the rest of the mouse cake'" - mousse cake, I guess - it looks like mouse - "And you didn't need to finish the Chardonnay.' But after 30 years of marriage, I finally understood what not to say on the way home with my husband from a dinner party." What Judith Viorst doesn't tell us, that any of us that have been married that long or longer completely understands, is that she may not say it on the way home, but you can bet the ranch that that gets said within the near future. Wives can be prophets to their husbands. They speak with confidence and they tell it like it is, even if the hearers are dull-witted. It could possibly be reversed about husbands, but that's for somebody else to say. Because I live with one. A wife, that is.

A parent is a prophet. When a parent leads a child, when a child doesn't want to hear it... The president of CSU has a daughter who's going off to college, in another state. The president of CSU spoke to the parents of the freshman students last week. This is what he said. "I know what you're going through. You've got mixed feelings. Our daughter's talking to me about the classes she's going to take, and what she wants to do with her life, as she leaves, and I'm saying to myself, 'She's got it all together. She's grown up.' And then she calls from the airport to say that she's lost her drivers license, and she wants to know if I think she needs to get another ID. And I say to myself, 'She doesn't have a clue.'" Parents need to be prophets to their kids. They need to lead them, they need to tell them. Parents will say it. "You need to be more careful. You want to make good choices, because your bad choices will live with you for the rest of your lives." Parents will say to their children, "Study hard, clean up your room, write thank-you notes. What's with the loud music? And who are you writing to on the Internet?" Sometimes we have to lead people. That's what prophets do. They don't want to hear it, but we do it.

There was a CEO of a company that was called upon by many people to give seminars on ethics. He was a United Methodist, and his pastor spoke endearingly of him, and there was this one thing when he spoke he would say often, to the point that it kind of was a mantra. You would see him and you would think of this. "The responsibility of our company is a responsibility I expect to be fulfilled. It is to insure the legal ethical conduct by this company and everyone in it. It is the most important thing we do." And the company has its ethical position on its t-shirts and on coffee mugs and banners. The word is RICE, it stands for Respect, Integrity, Community, Excellence. The company no longer exists. The building stands, still. the CEO died, a heart attack, awaiting trial. His name was Kenneth Lay, the company was Enron, and what they needed in that company was a prophet who could lead the people by telling them what they didn't want to hear,

but what they had to hear, to live their motto. It's a bad job. Sometimes we've got to do it. And here's the thing. You can't be a priest without also being a prophet. And you can't be a prophet if you aren't also a priest. To love the people is to serve them, but if we do not lead them too, we become their slave. And to lead the people is to speak out, but if we lead them and do not love them, we become mean-spirited gossips. The best job, the priest, who serves. The worst job, the prophet, who speaks. We all have a job to do. Just be sure and do it. Let us pray.

O God, give us the compassion of the love that is at the table in Christ, and give us the courage to lead that is the heart of the prophet who cares. May we meet both compassion and courage to be the prophet and the priest, to do the job you need us to do. Amen.