

Being Imperfect Together – 04-23-15

Saving Grace

Sue Self, LCSW

I have a deep love for the services Catholics have during Holy Week; each is different, with its own flavor and meaning. But every year I am struck by the Holy Thursday service, particularly the washing of the feet. There is no shortage of writings about this ritual, its meaning and symbolism, but I have come to think about it in yet another way.

Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, a lowly task reserved for the least of the servants. Peter objects, saying that he should be washing Jesus' feet instead. Then Jesus says something that must have further confused Peter: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me".

In the way I look at it, He's saying, at least in one sense maybe, that Peter has to allow himself to be served, or rather, accept being cared for.

When I offer our Caring Ministry to people who are hurting or struggling with something, they often refuse, and sometimes say "someone else needs it more than me" or "I don't need it; I'll be all right." If my thinking about what Jesus said holds any water, they needed it; we all do.

Maybe desperately.

I know, at least in my head, not always in my heart, that this is true, and I am struck by how, maybe particularly at Clare & Francis, we seem more willing to serve than to be served. To wash feet, rather than have them washed.

Not surprising, really. In our culture, to be served, or cared for, carries implications of weakness, or failure, or incompetence. A sense of being needy, unable to fix or care for oneself, or not being as good as others who can. At the very least, it requires us to be vulnerable, to surrender something that protects us, to put ourselves in the hands of another, with no guarantee of safety.

Now, there's a call. One that brings grace.

Not only that, but consider the idea that one simply cannot serve, would be unable to do what Jesus asks, or to emulate Him, unless someone is willing to be served. In the Caring Ministry, when a person puts their heart in the hands of a minister, I am in awe of the courage they've shown in doing so... far more than it takes to be a minister. I am stunned by the resilience, the willingness to accept love and care, the ability to trust, even after the world has beaten them up. What comes up is not pity, nor is it a sense that I am with someone who is weak, needy, or incompetent, but rather the belief that I am in the presence of God's grace.

In a caring relationship, there is no concept of one being better than the other, no idea that struggling somehow makes one 'less', OR that being a minister makes one 'more'. When we step

from doing something to or for the other and move toward sharing it with, it becomes relationship, and what reveals itself then, is both faces of God - the gentle, loving spirit, and the broken, bleeding Savior. God is in love with both, equally. And calls each of us to receive the grace that comes with living them both, not one or the other.

I write this because I know two things: that I have brothers and sisters at Clare & Francis who are hurting or struggling, and that we have a Caring Ministry, poised to share that journey. I invite both to embrace the gift God calls us to. To wash feet, and have them washed.

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