

# Love Feast

Maundy Thursday, March 29, 2018  
Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren

## All are Welcome

### Meditation Music

#### Scripture

Psalm 30:11-12

*“You have turned my mourning into dancing,”* the Psalmist sings and prays; *“you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”* So ends the 30<sup>th</sup> Psalm, but not before it hits both the heights and the depths of our journey with God. It overflows with praise and thanksgiving. It also knowingly speaks to the pits of life we all face. *“Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning”* (30:5b).

#### Welcome and Prayer

We are gathered here on this night of nights to remember and reenact a meal that took place long ago – the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples. It itself was a remembrance and reenactment of a much earlier meal, the Passover, when the angel of death passed over the homes of the children of Israel – a frightening evening when the homes of Egyptian slavemasters were filled with anguish at the loss of their firstborn. It was the final straw for Pharaoh, who then let God’s people go from their bondage – the beginning of their Exodus.

While this evening’s meal is not a Passover celebration, it is a remembrance of deliverance. We wash feet (or hands), share a modest meal, and celebrate communion, simply because our Lord Jesus told us to do so. By the way, that’s what the “maundy” in Maundy Thursday is all about. From this Latin word comes “mandate” – a command. Like when Jesus said, *“a new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you”* (John 13:34). Indeed, tonight we remember his command to love as he loved, a mandate for all our days, not just this evening. That’s why we call this our “Love Feast.”

In her book, **“The Gifts of Imperfection,”** author Brené Brown writes that “throughout human history, we’ve relied on laughter, song, and dance to express ourselves, to communicate our stories and emotions, to celebrate and to mourn, and to nurture community... Laughter, song, and dance are so woven into the fabric of our everyday life that we can forget how much we value the people who can make us laugh, the songs that inspire us to roll down the car window and sing at the top of our lungs, and the total freedom we feel when we (to borrow the words of Mark Twain) ‘dance like no one is watching.’” (p. 117)

As Easter this year falls on April 1<sup>st</sup>, something that has not happened (believe it or not) since I was 9 months old, the thought of laughter on such a sober-serious night seems right and good. Certainly, the disciples on that original night of nights were not frowning sourpusses, especially not with the Lord of Love in their midst – the One who would dance his way to the cross, regardless of who might be watching. Therefore, I welcome you to this feast of Love, where we will sing in the shower, laugh around the table, and dance with him to the cross. Are you willing? Join with me in the simple prayer printed in your bulletin.

Come Lord Jesus be our guest,

let these gifts to us be blest. Amen

Let us sing a song of welcome, found on the insert.

## All are Welcome

1. Let us build a house where all can dwell and all can safely  
2. Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and  
3. Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and  
4. Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and  
5. Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions

live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn  
true, where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's  
wheat: a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and  
stone to heal and strength-en, serve & teach, and live the  
heard and loved and treasured, taught & claimed as words with-

to for-give. Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of  
reign a-new. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as  
jus-tice meet. Here the love of God, through Je-sus, is re-  
Word they've known. Here the out-cast and the stran-ger bear the  
in the Word. Built of tears and cries and laugh-ter, prayers of

faith and vault of grace; here the love of Christ shall end di-vi-sions:  
sym-bol of God's grace; here as one we claim the faith of Je-sus.  
vealed in time and space; as we share in Christ the feast that frees us.  
i-mage of God's face; let us bring an end to fear and dan-ger.  
faith and songs of grace, let this house pro-claim from floor to raf-ter.

All are wel-come, all are wel-come, all are wel-come in this

place. Let us

words and music by Marty Haugen  
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## Moving to the Feetwashing Circles

Our pattern for Love Feast here has been to see it as a journey. We move from these pews to the circles of chairs for feet and hand washing, and then on to the tables that are set up in the form of a cross. The men's circle for feetwashing is in the back of the sanctuary. The women's circle(s) is/are on the other side of the wall in the fellowship hall. You will not need a hymnal as you head forth, so travel lightly. Where you sit depends upon you, but consider sitting in a new seat, beside someone different. The deacons who will guide the hand washing will make themselves known, for those who need to sit near them for that option... Shall we continue?

## Singing in the Shower

### Scripture

1 Corinthians 13

<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.  
<sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.  
<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we

prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

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## Meditation

We know those words. We've heard them many times before. We might even be able to speak a good portion of them by heart. Especially the last sentence. "*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is ... love.*" It's almost like a song we might sing in the shower, one that resides like an ear worm – a tune we can't help but sing along when the music starts up in our head. It doesn't matter how well we can belt out the words, because we are, after all, in the shower. There is no audience to listen in and judge.

Feetwashing is a bit like that, or at least it should be. This is familiar territory for many of us gathered here this evening. Yes, some among us now may find what we're about to do a bit strange and different. Perhaps you haven't heard this song before and don't know the words. If that's the case, just feel the rhythm and move with us. For most, however, we've heard the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet many times. His challenge to them then, and to us now, is an ear worm that won't go away. "*Do you know what I have done*

*for you? You call me Teacher and Lord – & you are right, for that I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*" (John 14:13-14).

Washing feet tonight is a bit like singing in the shower. It really doesn't matter that we're doing it right. The tune and the words are just getting further ingrained in our being, etched upon our hearts – if you will – for when it does really matter. This is practice time, preparation for when we need to truly speak love instead of just noisily clanging away; doing love rather than going through all the impressive motions that look good on a religious resumé but don't really touch the need of another person.

Now, I not saying that showering is unimportant. If none of us soaped up at some point before tonight, it might be pretty rank in this place right now. How many of you washed your own feet just before this service, out of respect for the person who will soon bend down to care for them? But the exact details of how we wash (whether it has to be feet, for instance – can washing each other's hands substitute for those who really shouldn't be getting down on weak knees?); well, the details aren't as significant as us just doing it. Furthermore, we can sing our hearts out as we do.

Of course, the thought of doing this together may be a bit embarrassing. It was a humbling experience for me recently to allow a nursing aide to help me clean myself when I couldn't in the hospital. I don't think either of us were singing our way through that, but I was thankful, all the same. The song of Agape love still goes on, even if we have a hard time singing it, our voices silent. As Paul wrote, "Love never ends."

I invite you now to practice love in preparation for the real deal of serving in Jesus' name. Whether you get down on your knees to wash the feet of another, or remain seated and

wash each other's hands because your knees aren't what they once were, isn't the point. What matters is the love song woven through it all, reminiscent of the night Jesus sat together with his disciples and invited them to sing love's song, to be of good cheer, and to dance toward the cross and beyond.

Some of us gathered around the piano last Sunday to record a verse or two of several familiar hymns. The quality of the recording leaves a little to be desired. It's a bit like that scratchy, old album you of seasoned years may have once listened to, over and over. However, instead of everyone flipping through our hymnals while we wash feet, why don't we just sing with the recording as you catch the familiar tunes. Hum along, if you can't recall the words. No one is listening to the quality of your singing voice, like we aren't judging how well you wash feet or hands. No, with God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we are paying attention to what is on the inside. Instead of reading the hymnal, look to the person whose feet or hands you wash or who washes yours. See Jesus in them.

**Tub and Towel time** *(sing by heart to the recording)*

## Moving to the Lord's Table

# Laughter around the Table

## Scripture

Isaiah 51:1-6, 11

- 1 - Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord.
- 2 - Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.
- 1 - Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.
- 2 - For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.
- 1 - Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples.
- 2 - I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.
- 1 - So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing;
- 2 - everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
- 1 - they shall obtain joy and gladness,
- 2 - and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

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## Meditation

*“Be of good cheer,”* Jesus said, *“I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). The Greek word for being cheerful in this verse can also be translated as *“have courage,” “take heart,”* or *“don’t be afraid.”* Perhaps we might paraphrase it as *“laugh in the face of your fears.”* When the prophet Isaiah encouraged the ragtag band of Israelites to return home to an uncertain future in Jerusalem after their fearful exile in Babylon, he spoke of joy and gladness. *“The ransomed of the Lord shall return,”* he said, *“and come to Zion with singing”* (Isaiah 51:11).

With his disciples on that fateful last supper night long ago, I imagine the room in which they ate was filled with a variety of emotions. His followers all probably knew something big was about to happen, though they hadn’t quite pieced together what it was, in spite of everything Jesus had said. Were they ready for whatever was coming their way? No, in spite of everything their rabbi had taught them in preparation. Are we ever fully ready? Probably not.

Can you imagine what they might have been thinking and feeling long ago as they remembered the Passover with Jesus? For some, this was just another feast, like many they had celebrated in the past – special because of its location in the city King David built. Others may have had a foreboding sense of fear, for they had caught enough of the master’s words to know bad news might be just around the corner. I’m guessing nervous tension may have been the prevailing mood. What’s a good way of relieving such tension? Tell a joke. Laughter is good medicine, you know.

If you listen closely to the story as we’ve received it, you can hear a bit of humor. Was Peter, for instance, just a uncomprehending dolt when he encouraged Jesus to not stop with his feet, but instead wash all of him? Could he have been

trying to lighten the mood? Were there some chuckles around the room over his back-and-forth with Jesus? Scripture doesn’t say, and so we treat it with a super sense of seriousness. Which is how we often approach holy moments in life. We forget that such times are woven into our everyday existence. We think there is but one way to be respectful. Don’t smile. Look down. Shut your mouth. Be sorry, or at least appear that way.

But didn’t Jesus invite his followers to *“be of good cheer,”* to *“laugh in the face of your fears”*? Didn’t the apostle Paul write that the best way to respond to God, to offer yourself to the Lord, was *“not with reluctance or under compulsion.”* Didn’t he say that *“God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7)? I, for one, don’t believe that good humor is out of place on this special evening. Now, I know that many Brethren churches celebrate Love Feast in total silence, minus scripture reading, preaching and singing. That’s not, however, the tradition I found here when I came 28 years ago. This portion of the meal has been anything but quiet, even when I tried to make it otherwise. Here, the sound of slurping and munching and tinkling of china and glass is lost amid fellowship around the table.

I frankly don’t think that the first upper room experience was sober-serious silence. Many of these disciples were fishermen, after all, and you know the tales they can tell. James and John, the “sons of thunder,” may have been known not just for their zeal, but also for the loud chuckles they could elicit. Matthew could probably tell a few good ones from his tax collecting days. How many excuses are there to avoid paying? If we can’t laugh over our past, can we truly let it go?

And most of all Jesus, the master storyteller. His parables are full of good humor. A woman who sweeps and sweeps and sweeps and sweeps just to find that lost coin. The kingdom of God is like that, he said. It’s also like ... what? ...

a mustard seed? ... a shepherd who leaves the flock to search for one lost sheep? ... a farmer who willy-nilly tosses seed on a field full of rocks and birds and weeds and *some* good soil? ... Remember that story about a bunch of bridesmaids? If there were women nearby when Jesus told that one, they would have gotten a good laugh over the foolish girls who came unprepared... “*Be of good cheer,*” he said, “*I have overcome the world.*”

I invite you, as we eat together, to share any good jokes you can remember, any humorous stories you can tell. I hope to hear some chuckles around the tables. Now, I know some folks are better at this than others. Me? I too often forget the most important parts of jokes. Without a punchline, they can fall flat. I know. I’ve been there. Or I recall the clincher, but not the set-up. Some of us are better at comedy. You do know, don’t you, that comedy is often born of sorrow. Robin Williams, for instance, had such a great mind for the hilarious, but struggled with a dark cloud that eventually took his life. “*Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads,*” Isaiah promised, “*they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*”

Good humor builds up. It doesn’t tear down. Be sure your jokes don’t put anyone down. And do refrain from profanity. There may be times when it almost unconsciously flows from our lips, especially in anger, but now is not such a time. It's okay if you don’t have a joke to share. Appreciate the ones that are told, and “*be of good cheer,*” “*laugh in the face of your fears.*” To bless this meal, let’s sing a familiar prayer, the words printed in your bulletin. The joke at camp is that this Johnny Appleseed song makes it rain... Join in.

## Blessing the meal with a song

Oh, the Lord's been good to me.  
And so I thank the Lord  
for giving me the things I need:  
the sun and the rain and the appleseed.  
The Lord's been good to me.

©1946 Walt Disney Music Co.

## Eating Together

# Dancing to the Cross

Hymn

“The Lord of the Dance”

(insert)

## Lord of the Dance

1. I danced in the morn - ing when the world was be - gun, and I  
 2. I danced for the scribe and the Phar - i - see, but they  
 3. I danced on the sab - bath and I cured the lame; the  
 4. I danced on a Fri - day when the sky turned black; it's  
 5. They cut me down and I leapt up high, for

danc'd in the moon and the stars and the sun, and I came down from heav - en and I  
 would not dance and they would not fol - low me; I danced for the fish - er - men, for  
 ho - ly peo - ple said it was a shame. They whip'd and they strip'd me and they  
 hard to dance with the dev - il on your back. They bur - ied my bo - dy and they  
 I am the life that will nev - er, nev - er die; I'll live in you if you'll

danced on the earth, at Beth - le - hem I had my birth.  
 James and John; They came to me and the dance went on.  
 hung me high; and they left me there on a cross to die.  
 thought I'd gone, But I am the dance and I still go on.  
 live in me; I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

"Dance, then, wher - ev - er you may be, I am the Lord, of the dance," said he. "And I'll

lead you all wher - ev - er you may be, and I'll lead you all in the dance," said he.

words by Sydney Carter, 1963 music adapted from a 19th Century Shaker tune  
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## Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:20-25

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews

and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

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## Meditation

The apostle Paul was apparently called a “fool” by many, both by those who looked in from outside the Jesus movement, as well as by those who were within it. He unabashedly pointed to the cross, a symbol of defeat and shame, and spoke of victory and joy. In those familiar words we often read at such moments as this, he wrote that “*as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Really. When it comes to this portion of a meal that lies at the heart of our faith, it does seem rather foolish to say that we “proclaim Jesus' death” by doing it. Why not focus upon the resurrection and lift up life, instead of death – especially the horrible way in which our Lord died? “*We proclaim Christ crucified*,” Paul wrote, a declaration that was “*a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles*.” It still trips up, and is still considered silly, by many.

The truth is, we are being real. Life is not, after all, a succession of mountaintop experiences. There are deep and dark valleys through which we all tread. Furthermore, death is an integral part of the equation, which cannot be sanitized. How we walk through the valley of the shadow of death matters. What does the Psalm say? “I fear no evil” as I travel. I/we can laugh in the face of our fears. We can take heart and



sing out as if no one were listening. Why? Well, because someone is. “Thou art with me,” gently guiding through it all. Someone who knows the steps.

I love the song we just sang, written by a Quaker to an old Shaker tune, “Simple Gifts,” to which they would dance as they worshipped. Life itself, is a dance. And Jesus is the Lord of the dance. Yes, he was arrested like a common criminal. Yes, he was beaten. Yes, he faced a succession of judges, all of whom tried to avoid responsibility for what they all wanted done. Yes, it finally fell on a mob to make the decision to “Crucify him,” like a faceless crowd filled with blood thirst headed to a lynching.

Yes, he was forced to carry the instrument of his own execution. Yes, they nailed him up like so many other troublemakers and thieves, Rome’s way of keeping the peace. Yes, he suffered an excruciating death that took what must have seemed like an eternity to finish. Yes, his broken and holey/holy body was taken down from that cross and placed in a tomb (thankfully not thrown on a pile of garbage like some). But the proper preparation, according to Jewish practice, could not be administered to it. Anointing had to wait until after the Sabbath. Yes, all of this is part of the story we remember. But the point is, Jesus willingly say “yes” to all of this. He did not let the cup pass from his hands. In so doing, he made of it all a dance – full of purpose, the steps grace-full, flowing from the heart of God.

Yes, we know the rest of the dance. With joy and laughter in our hearts we sing: “They buried my body and they thought I’d gone. But I am the dance and I still go on.” We don’t get to the empty tomb, however, without the cross. The tableland prepared for us, the healing balm recalled by the Psalmist, leads through the valley of the shadow of death, a dance with which we are familiar. But with bread and cup in

hand we, my friends, are not simply the sheep of God’s pasture. We are (to use an image that may cause some to chuckle); we are (all together) the “bride of Christ.” We follow his leading in the dance.

Can you hear the tune? Do you sense his guiding hand? I know good Brethren have a hard time with dancing, but aren’t your feet just itching to move? *Christ crucified* sings to us, “I am the life that will never, never die. I’ll live in you if you live in me. I am the Lord of the dance, said he.”

Please join me in prayer.

## Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord of the dance, we are grateful for your invitation. “*Come to me, all who are weary and carrying heavy loads,*” you say, “*and I will give you rest.*” You refresh our spirits as you hold out your hand and lead us onward, for we were not created to passively watch as wallflowers, but to move as participants in your kingdom dance.

Yes, we stumble as those who seem to have two left feet, just as we often lose track of the joy in your good news, and fail to sing your glory – thinking we have to do so with perfect timing and pitch. But you are ever near, always full of grace and encouragement. “Just put your foot here,” you say. “Be of good cheer, lift up your voice.”

So, here we are at your table, Christ Jesus. Before us is the baker’s delight - unleavened like the bread of Passover, ready for the journey; not too much, like the manna in the wilderness, sufficient for this moment in time. Broken together, we remember your body broken for our salvation. In this this bread we



also recall that we are to be your body here and now for the world around us. Bless it, and bless us, O Lord. Before us also is the fruit of the vine to quench parched lips and thirsty souls. Not much, just enough. Drinking from the cup together, we remember the blood you shed to set us free to serve, the doorposts of our hearts painted and protected like the Israelites of old. Bless it, and bless us, O Lord.

As we dance to the cross just now, eating this bread and drinking from the cup, help us to sing out, shout out, live out your life-giving death until that great Love Feast when your kingdom comes and your will is done, on earth as it is in heaven. Thank you. Amen

## Eating the Bread

With the person across the table from you, hold the piece of bread together and repeat after me:

“The bread which we break  
is the communion of the body of Christ”  
Eat it together.

## Drinking the Cup

With the person across the table from you, hold up your cup and repeat after me:

“This cup of the New Testament  
is the communion of the blood of Christ”  
Drink it together.

## Hymn

“I cannot dance, O Love” (Hymnal #45)

We haven’t yet sung together #45 in our hymnal, mainly because the music is a bit beyond most of us. However, the words are marvelous and can be sung to more familiar tunes. They’re based on the poetry of Mechthild of Magdeburg, who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a medieval mystic, like Hildegard of Bingen or Julian of Norwich – spiritual giants of an earlier era. They give us a window into the world of worship and prayer. The verses are printed in your bulletin. Please rise in body or spirit, and let’s sing them to “The church’s one foundation” (#311).

1.

I cannot dance, O Love, unless you lead me on.  
I cannot leap in gladness unless you lift me up.  
From love to love we circle, beyond all knowledge grow,  
for when you lead we follow, to new worlds you can show.

2.

Love is the music round us, we glide as birds in air,  
entwining, soul and body, your wings hold us with care.  
Your Spirit is the harpist and all your children sing;  
her hands the currents round us, your love the golden strings.

3.

O blessed Love, your circling unites us, God and soul.  
Your arms, from the beginning, embrace and make us whole.  
Hold us in steps of mercy from which you never part,  
that we may know more fully the dances of your heart.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1297)  
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# Benediction

Go in love,  
for love alone endures.

Go in peace,  
for it is the gift of God.

Go in safety,  
for we cannot go where God is not.

by Earle W. Fike, Jr.,  
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After the meal, you are invited to participate in the fellowship  
discovered in cleaning up. Thanks to all who prepared, led, participated,  
and picked up afterward.