

-Many of you, I hope, have had good a positive internship sometime in your life. An internship where you have had one or two really solid mentors who have taught you a lot about a certain vocation, or life skill. My internship for being a pastor was one of those year long learning events and one of the strong mentors I encountered during this time was Pastor Lyle Beckman. Pastor Lyle is an ordained pastor with the ELCA but his congregation is by far the most unique. Lyle works for the San Francisco Night Ministry, an organization that has existed for 52 years. The purpose of the San Francisco Night Ministry is simple: provide pastoral care and God's love, especially during the times of the night (midnight to 7am) when city services and other shelters are not readily available. Every night, one or two night ministers and a handful of night volunteers answer phone calls and walk the streets of San Francisco talking to people who are homeless, drunk, scared, high, lonely, and everything inbetween. One of Lyle's most incredible stories that he told me was when he got a call from a woman who who told the Night Ministry Office that her boyfriend was abusing her. Lyle, understandably, told her that the Night Ministry was not not the police and that if she felt immediately in danger, that is who she should call first. She however explained that her boyfriend was an undocumented immigrant and that calling the police could get him deported. Thus, after much time assessing the situation, Lyle reluctantly went over to the apartment. Accept it wasn't an apartment, but a room that was probably being rented out illegally. In fact the only way to get to the room was through a small crawl space accessed from one of the windows in the alley. Thus, Pastor Lyle, who weighs around 250 lbs or so (not the smallest guy in the world), crawled his way into the room in which he discovered the woman and the boyfriend standing there looking at him, both red faced and hoarse from yelling at each other. Lyle told me he stood there for a moment not really knowing what to do....does he immediately accuse the boyfriend of abuse? Does he try to get this woman to safety somehow? The boyfriend came across the room and asked: "who are you?" He stood there for a moment and finally acted on a thought that just popped into his head: "I'm Pastor Lyle", he said. "I was called here by your girlfriend to help. Could I have a glass of water?"

-We live in an age of quick judgement and accusation. Maybe that's why I can't help but read our gospel story this morning of Jesus washing his disciple's feet with this lense.

-To me, what is most striking is the "set-up" for what should have been a show down. After all, Jesus knows everything -- knows that his hour to depart from this world had arrived; that he had loved his own to the end; and that now, finally, the "devil had put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him" (verse 2). So, when I read this, it shocks me: Why would anyone do what Jesus did next knowing what he knows? Consider our own day and age: "I've got the evidence! It's the leak!" It's the "smoking gun" or the incriminating trove of emails. We fully expect, perhaps, Jesus to stand up at the table and announce that this is all a fraud, and I know it, you know it, and I've got

the evidence to prove it! We want him to call Judas out and say: "Liar! Betrayer" (maybe some other words that are not family appropriate) I have to be honest...Maybe a part of me would like him to do so -- to be a divine whistle blower.

-And yet Jesus does something else. He gets a bowl of water and washes some feet.

-Instead of exposing their hearts -- not Judas' or even Peter's -- he reveals himself as the one who loved his own to the end, even becoming a servant, knowing full well the mixed motives of his disciples.

-The action of Jesus washing his disciples' feet is seen as many things throughout the centuries: ultimate love, humility, model for all of us to emulate, etc.. All of these things I believe are true, but the interesting part for me is that Jesus doesn't just pull these things out of thin air. He doesn't just say (OK, go love one another). Instead, he uses water as a vehicle to first disarm the disciple's anxiety and then show them the pinnacle of what it means to be human. Water is used here I believe to get past the motives and go straight to the heart.

-Turns out the boyfriend was as surprised by Pastor Lyle's question of some water as Pastor Lyle was with coming up with it. He stuttered a bit and said, "Oh....uh....yeah, sure." After getting a mug with half a handle, Lyle sat down in a lawn chair (one of the only pieces of furniture in the room) and asked if he could talk with the boyfriend alone. The boyfriend, he noted, also got a glass of water to drink. So began a long conversation of struggle, hardship, and perseverance which the boyfriend, seemed very appreciative to tell. Lyle found out a few things that night. The first was that actually the girlfriend used the calling of the police and possible deportation as a threat that, by what Lyle could tell, she hung over this man's head repeatedly. She later explained that she was not being abused, but that she called the Night Ministry in order to scare the boyfriend even more. "I didn't, I'll admit, expect you to actually come," she said. "I called you because I wanted him to be afraid because I was mad."

-Lyle, after drinking a glass of water with each person separately, finally mediated a conversation together where many of these things came out. At the end, both had tears in their eyes, apologies were said, even a group hug happened before Lyle took his leave and crawled out of the room.

-Water can be a powerful tool to cross the boundary of judgement and motive. So in my opinion, the good news of our gospel story is not just the fact that Jesus was the ultimate servant. The good news is Jesus taking some water and instead of right away accusing and screaming he chooses to acknowledge the humanness in each person gathered in that room. What would this world look like if water was present in accusation? If a moment to pause and acknowledge one's wholeness as a human being was present in disagreement. What other outcomes would we come to?

-May you be blessed in knowing that you are valued by God as a total person and that maybe our practice of acknowledging this fact to one another can be huge. One glass of water at a time. Amen.