

**Holy Thursday, April 5, 2007**

**John 13:1-17, 31b - 35**

**It's Obvious.**

**Rev. Susan Bresser**

Isn't it obvious?

Isn't it obvious? How much God loves you? It is obvious, isn't it? For some of us, yeah (!) ... for others, ummm, they wonder. Certainly through the scriptures, through the modeling of Jesus, it is obvious that God loves us. It is obvious that we have a responsibility. It is obvious the expectation and the challenge. It's as plain as the nose on your face.

In and through our sacraments it's obvious how much God loves us. We are the United Methodist Church, the Protestant Church, and we celebrate two sacraments: baptism and holy communion. In baptism, the gift of water is a symbol of new life ... abundant new life. Water represents life, because we can go for days without food, but if we do not have water, we will die. A simple common everyday element ... water.

Why do we baptize? It's obvious!! ... I'm kidding ... sometimes it's not obvious. Our sacraments can be mysterious but I hope to point out the obvious.

We, the church, offer baptism as a sacrament because Jesus was baptized. This leads to the big question: If Jesus was sinless – without sin – as the scriptures proclaim, then why did he need the experience of washing away sin and the offering of new life?

Oh, there are many answers to the question of why Jesus was baptized ... many theologians claiming to know the answer, so it isn't always obvious. What I know: by allowing John to baptize him, Jesus set an example. That's what I believe ... certainly what I believe about the sacraments. I believe that most everything Jesus did was to set an example for us. He modeled faith ... obviously. He modeled compassion ... obviously. He modeled truth ... obviously. He modeled wholeness ... obviously.

Jesus was baptized so that he could identify himself with us ... an act of solidarity with humanity ... a sinful humanity. What's obvious about baptism is that it's all about promise. God promises us a new life through Jesus Christ and we promise to change our lives in order to serve God and experience this new life.

Why speak of baptism on Holy Thursday? This is the day we remember the last supper. We're talking about it because I have discovered something – something obvious – in and through baptism.

For a long time I had a tendency to sprinkle when I baptized because that's how I learned to do it. Scott Carlson came as the new pastor and I remember the first baptism we had together and he poured. There was water all over the place ... all over the floor, all over the baby's face (and the baby was sputtering), all down the sleeve of his robe ... and my first thought was "who's going to clean up this mess?" I discovered that I was a little stingy with God's abundance, with God's new life. I have begun practicing what I

have known all along! I just needed someone to show me. I would hope we make that known through baptism.

In and through our sacraments it's obvious how much God loves us. Holy Communion ... the simple act of sharing the bread and the cup ... the meal we celebrate this evening, is truly a representation of the abundance of God's gifts and how much God loves us. When we offer communion by intinction, as we will do this evening, I often tell people to rip off a good-sized chunk of bread. God's an abundant God ... there is plenty to go around. When we invite you to communion this evening don't be shy. Be joyful in the abundance ... even if you're still chewing when you get back to your seat. It's okay. How can we experience how good it tastes to love God if we don't have something to chew on?

We celebrate holy communion to remember ... in fact those words come straight from the liturgy: "do this in remembrance of me." We remember Jesus and everything Jesus represents: community, wholeness, compassion, grace, abundance of love.

This evening we remember the meal Jesus shared with his disciples before he faced his death. In that time, Jesus not only modeled faith, he also modeled risk-taking and challenge.

He washed the disciples' feet. Pretty radical, given he was performing the duties of a servant. And they were pretty surprised. Peter especially – "no, you cannot wash my feet ... ever ... that's just not right."

After Jesus washed the feet of his friends, he put his robe back on, and sat down at the table, saying: “do you understand what I just did? Do you understand my actions? If so, do the same. I am simply pointing out the obvious that if you want to be my disciples, you must do as I have done.”

It’s obvious – it’s really not that mysterious, it’s really not that obscure ... it’s obvious. If we are followers of Christ, we must lead Christ-like lives. The real meaning of discipleship is obvious. We are to do as Jesus does. We are to love as Jesus loves. I hope we don’t miss the obvious, especially today, the saddest day of the church year as we prepare for the death of Jesus.

God loves us. In worship, in fellowship, in sharing the sacraments, in committee meetings, in church school, in LOGOS, in choir rehearsal, in everything we do as God’s people, I hope we make it obvious that God loves us. I hope that you experience the obvious here at the Sun Prairie United Methodist Church.

Here’s what’s awesome: We know what happens in three days. We know. It’s pretty obvious that God loves us.

Let us prepare for the obvious abundance that we share as God’s people as we prepare for a time of Holy Community.