

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get through this thing called ‘Life.’ Electric word, ‘life,’ it means forever and that’s a mighty long time.”*

As the late Prince tells us, forever is a mighty long time. On the other hand, it’s not like we have to wait any more for it to start. That’s part of the ongoing promise of Easter, that this thing called life—new life, abundant life, eternal life—is ours, and it has already begun with Christ being raised from the dead. It’s a new day. Easter ushers in a brand new day. Easter foresees for us and calls us to see a new heaven and a new earth—coming to us from God. The risen Lord Jesus is making all things new—ALL things new. Wasn’t that our theme here at CTK just a couple of years ago, All Things New? Yes, Death is swallowed up, tears are dried, all things are made new, and not just “out there” somewhere. As Levi experienced first-hand today, and as we all were hopefully reminded again today, in the mystery of holy baptism God has made new people out of all of us. Today, once again, Jesus invites us to see everything in a new way, to see everyone in a new light—through the lens of love.

In fact, that’s one of the reasons some of us may be experiencing a chronological whiplash of sorts, since here we are four full Sundays *after* Easter taking a look at a text from what is clearly before Easter, from Maundy Thursday actually, from the last supper, on the night that Jesus was betrayed. But now we get to see it again on the other side of the resurrection, we get to see it through the lens of love—love that is both embodied by Jesus and commanded of his followers. Love that has formed us individually and as a community. Love that calls us to compassion, love that compels us to action.

I would imagine that most of us have memories of certain actions that bring to mind a deeper connection—something beyond that action itself. An embrace, a look, a certain quality in a voice, a particular gathering around a specific table. I remember the way my mom would look right at me and nod when I was telling her something—a tiny gesture, perhaps, but one that meant she was listening attentively, that what I had to say mattered. I can remember the deep respect signaled in a particular kind of handshake offered in East and Southern Africa, with the hand under the elbow as if to further extend the offered hand, or the way West African Muslims would immediately touch their hearts after shaking my hand. I remember vividly the way my grandfather’s firm hand on my shoulder at my ordination was at once familiar and formal—a gesture of calling

*Prince, “Go Crazy,” *Purple Rain*, 1984.

and of a mantle passed, even when he struggled to remember my name or exactly how I related to him.

Last week Pastor John had us close our eyes and think of a familiar voice, a voice we knew well, a voice we identified with or even followed. This week, I invite you to close your eyes again, but this time picture a gesture, a movement, an action done by someone who is or was important to you—an action that communicated that love, or maybe their approval, their deep connection, their authentic care for you. Imagine that particular gesture—maybe some sort of trademark movement by a person you love or loves you. Take a moment to imagine that. A simple, everyday action that this person does from time to time to not just tell you but *show* you that they love you. And then, briefly, turn to a person near you and share what that action, that gesture was and what it meant to you. [Let's just take a minute or so...]

People who study family systems remind us that we should pay lots of attention to what people *do*, not just what they say. An outward gesture of care is the one of the ways that our words are made flesh, our ideas turned into reality, how our love becomes action. It is, as it turns out, one of the constant challenges for us as Christians, we who are shaped both by the reality of the cross, and the new life we have received in the resurrection. How do we continually engage in actions that demonstrate what we believe?

Fifty-five years ago, there were several gestures, several actions taken that brought ideas into reality, that turned abstract love into concrete action. This congregation, Christ the King, New Brighton, was **formed in loved**, loved into action by caring gestures first of a called and committed pastor and his wife, and very soon by a few handfuls of charter members, some of whom are still with us here at CTK today. As I understand it, they met first in the living room of the parsonage, but quickly moved to the school that was down there on the corner of 7th street and 8th Avenue, where the Korean Methodist church is today. Before long, this growing congregation had purchased this land, built a first unit in which to worship, teach the faith, and build community. And as they outgrew that space, they—we!—started adding on, practically in all directions. A sanctuary, classrooms, offices, music rooms, a fireside lounge, a kitchen, a chapel, a gym. Formed in love, and answering the call to put that love into action, a beautiful, useful facility was created—one that we now have to opportunity in these next three years to fully pay for, a good part of whose upkeep and repair we have the chance to truly assure through this new capital appeal. These founders modeled for us what it means to put our Christ's love into action—not content to stop at the construction of a building to house our ministry, but also modeling a true and heartfelt sharing of God's love, reaching out to put that love into action for our congregation, for the community right

here around us, and indeed, to the very ends of the earth. We latter generations at Christ the King have had great role models for putting our money where our mouth is, for putting our faith into action, for living out Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved us.

Which is incredible and quite useful, since we humans actually best learn by example. Children watch what grown-ups do—and I hope I'm not the first to tell you it works the other way around, too: grown ups learn a lot from watching what children do. Sometimes we automatically copy those actions that have an impact on us. As we begin to act on Jesus' commandment to "love one another just as I have loved you," we can notice what connects with us and what doesn't. A warm greeting from someone at the door, or in the narthex. Making the sign of the cross as you pass by the baptismal font (which is why we put it by the door when we're not having a baptism). Crossing the sanctuary towards one particular person you've been meaning to share the peace with—maybe even someone you need to be reconciled to. An arm lovingly outstretched. A smile, a hug, a firm handshake, a wave. Bread shared with someone with whom we seem to always disagree, or maybe even someone who has betrayed us. No, we may not literally wash one another's feet, but we can and do care for the parts of one another's lives life that are can be ugly, smelly, broken or frightening. Far from being empty gestures, these actions actually embody the words we confess. These actions point to what it means to be formed in love—living and sharing the love that Jesus proclaimed and embodied through his life, death, and resurrection.

Of course, we do all this imperfectly—or at least, let me speak for myself in saying that I do this far from perfectly, and guessing you might also agree. Putting love in action gets complicated, and messy. We're human beings after all! And we often have differing roadmaps and agendas, even if we fully agree on what we're trying to do, where we're trying to go—which is not always to be assumed, either. Sometimes we're as stubbornly clueless as Peter and the other disciples, who right up to the end still don't quite "get" what Jesus is up to, what his foot-washing action might actually mean, just how literally his commandment to love one another is supposed to be taken.

See, Jesus' words "love one another as I have loved you" is not a reference only to the foot washing. If it were, foot-washing would probably be the third sacrament in the Lutheran Church, since, as many of our confirmation students can tell you, it has both the command of Jesus and a tangible, physical element involved. But this foot-washing is meant to remind the disciples and us of the entirety of Jesus' ministry—and to look for ways that we, too, can continue that mission and ministry here and now. Sure, those first disciples got to see and experience some over-the-top miracles, but they, like us 2000 years later have

the opportunity to train our eyes to look for the simplest signs of love that permeate the life of any community that follows Jesus. Imagine all the ways we've been formed in love. Imagine the big, memorable actions taken by this congregation in love for one another, for our community and our world. Now imagine as well all the easily overlooked, taken for granted gestures of love in actions among us here and now, among the community over the course of the past 55 years. Christ the King is one of those signs of how we have responded to Jesus' commandment to love one another as he has loved us. It is one of the many tangible ways the followers of Jesus continually, effectively, tirelessly, and lovingly get through this thing called life.

Electric word, 'life,' it means forever and that's a mighty long time. Thankfully, though, and contrary to what the songs says, in this life, we are NOT on our own. As disciples of Jesus, we are called—commanded, even—to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Jesus not commands to put our love into action, he sends the Holy Spirit to equip us to do so—in subtle movements and memorable gestures that orient us simultaneously toward God and toward our neighbors. As a community of faith known as Christ the King, as the body of Christ, we have been formed in love. For love. To love one another as Christ has loved us. To love the whole world for Jesus' sake.

And we are not alone. In Christ, we are formed in love, called to serve, and here to stay. Amen.