

*“The Worthy”*

Maxie Dunnam shared, “The Broadway musical, ‘**Godspell**’, has many wonderful scenes in it – many moving, dramatic moments. One of my favorites is that scene toward the end where Jesus is with his disciples in The Upper Room. He takes a bucket of water, a rag, and a mirror, and he goes to the disciples each in turn, and he washes away their clown faces. They had all been painted up as clowns. Then he holds the mirror up in front of them to let them see themselves as they really are, and then He hugs them. The point is clear and powerful.” **“They didn’t have to wear false faces. They didn’t have to hide their inadequacies. Nor do we. We don’t have to play pretend anymore. God loves and accepts us just as we are.”** (Maxie Dunnam, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com))

That “Godspell” interpretation of Jesus’ Washing of his Disciples’ Feet in John 13 connects his example of serving – agape loving with our True Identity for it is also the way our Divine Parent acted for us. **God Forgave us – Agape Loved us – Made us Worthy of the New Relationship with God and one another.** When we come to recognize – have faith in this Truth, then we are empowered to live as one, who has been Forgiven, Agape Loved, and Called to follow the Creator’s and Jesus’ examples of Agape Love and the spreading of the Good News of God’s Invitation and Welcome!

In this new Worship Series, “**The Outsiders**” our First Worship Celebration focuses on “**The Worthy**”. Who is Worthy of the Agape Love — the Grace — of God? Too often, people in or out of the church live with the belief, “I am not worthy.” They may be referring to their absence of faith, their life choices, or have even started to believe what “society” has declared about their identity. This week Jesus proclaims that what makes us worthy is not whether we are “in” or “out.” **As the Church, we are called to affirm the worth of all people.** How will we welcome the worthy and tear down the division between inside and out?

Some of us may continue to wonder about whether or not he or she or they are “Worthy”. There are many outsiders – those who believe they are rejected or will be rejected. Most don’t share in the Worship and Life of a local congregation because of their own feelings of inadequacy or their fear of being publicly rejected. **God sent Jesus into this Sacred Earth to demonstrate to everyone we are All made “Worthy” of being in the New Relationship with God. The Death of God’s Son was for the Purpose of Proving our Divine Parent Agape Loves, Invites, and Welcomes Everyone into the New Relationship with God.**

A few minutes ago, we watched and listened to music video, “Worth” by Anthony Brown. [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAsUbfm\\_14s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAsUbfm_14s)] It declared God thinks each of us and everyone else are **“worth saving” and “keeping” – that we are “to die for”**, and so our Divine Parent has acted to be with us to change our lives – to set us free and make us whole. Much of our music in this Worship Celebration joins with that music video in touching us emotionally and spiritually with that Wonderful Good News!

It has been reported, “Sometime ago in the ‘**Peanuts**’ comic strip as Lucy, Linus, and Charlie Brown looked up to the sky, Lucy said, ‘You can see lots of things in the clouds.’ Then turning to her companions, she asked ‘What do you see, Linus?’

‘Well,’ he said, ‘those clouds up there look to me like the map of the British Honduras on the Caribbean.’ Glancing in a different direction, ‘That cloud looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor. And that cloud formation over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen ... I can see The Apostle Paul standing there to one side.’

‘Uh huh,’ gasped Lucy, ‘That’s very good ... what do you see in the clouds, Charlie Brown?’ Charlie replied, **‘Well, I was going to say I saw a ducky and a horsie, but I’ve changed my mind.’** Linus was clearly a confident Theological and Biblical Insider, while Charlie Brown was embarrassed and felt very much the Outsider with reference to the subject of seeing things in the clouds. He believed his insight was not worthy of consideration.

Unfortunately, on the subject of being an outsider and determining one's worthiness, the New Testament and the history of the Early Church has provided confused and unhelpful descriptions of one's worthiness and how it relates to being on the inside of the Faith Community. Perhaps, the Apostle Paul bears much of the blame for the fuzziness on the topic of "Worthiness". In **Romans 4:5-8** Paul wrote, ***"But those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God Who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with Himself. This is what David meant when he spoke of the happiness of the person whom God accepts as righteous, apart from anything that person does: 'Happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven, whose sins are pardoned! Happy is the person whose sins the Lord will not keep account of!'"***

According to Paul, it is not by our deeds but by God's declaration that we are proclaimed to be "innocent". However, Paul has also been understood by many to say one must earn God's declaration of innocence by having faith. **So, is a person "innocent" or "worthy" because of God's Doing or because the individual has believed?** Part of the difficulty of getting a clear and consistent presentation on the subject of being "Worthy" from the Apostle Paul is his history and his failure to be totally liberated from it. **Paul had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees before his conversion experience on the Road to Damascus.** Although he was transformed by the Risen Jesus Christ into the Apostle to the Gentiles – the non-Jews, he, on occasion, slid back to his legalistic roots. When it came to his explaining "Faith" and the content of what one needed to believe, his Pharisaic background often returned to dominance.

So, let's look at our Gospel Lectionary Reading and let us be open to it proclaiming a much clearer message about how we are "Worthy". Notice, the Jewish Leaders in Capernaum considered the Roman Officer to be "worthy" and they asked Jesus to heal the Centurion's beloved slave in **verses 4-5**, ***"They came to Jesus and begged him earnestly, 'This man really deserves your help. He loves our people and he himself built a synagogue for us.'"*** Normally, the religious leadership would have wanted nothing to do with a Roman official but because they defined a person's "worth" in connection with how they were helped by the individual and, since he had built them their synagogue, they were eager to change from their normal tune!

Notice also, how the Roman Officer believed he had not done anything to make himself "worthy" in Jesus' and God's Sight for the Text reported in **verses 6b-7a**, ***"He was not far from the house when the officer sent friends to tell him, 'Sir, don't trouble yourself. I do not deserve to have you come into my house, neither do I consider myself worthy to come to you in person.'"***

It is easy to miss Jesus' assessment of the "worthiness" of the Centurion because of the focus on how the Roman Leader acknowledged Jesus' authority. Remember, before the Officer said he was not worthy, Jesus was already on his way to heal the dying beloved servant! He had not decided to heal the servant because of the Roman Leader's acknowledgment of Jesus' authority. Yes, Jesus praised the requestor's statement of faith after he made it but, he was going to heal the servant anyway! As stated in **verse 10**, ***"The messengers went back to the officer's house and found his servant well."*** Jesus' willingness to help the Roman Officer and his dying beloved slave was our Lord's clear signal that both of them were "worthy" of God's Agape Love!

Over and again, especially in the more Gentile leaning Gospel of Luke, Jesus has been revealed as God's Son, who came to declare God's Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome to All People – especially the Outsiders – the Outcasts – those declared "sinners" by the religious legalists. As Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:16**, ***"For God Agape Loved the World so much that He Gave His Only Son, so that Everyone who believes in him may not die but have Eternal Life."*** God Agape Loved the World – Everyone, so Everyone will trust in that Agape Love and God's Forgiveness – the Divine Parent's Declaration that they are "Worthy" and live in the New Relationship with God and All People and Live the Life of God's Kingdom. You and I and everyone we will ever meet are "Worthy" because God's Agape Loves All People! **Let that Agape Love shown in God's Son, Jesus the Christ, prove itself in our Savior and enable you to become an "Insider" in the New Relationship with God and let us all share God's Declaration and Invitation with Everyone, especially with those, who feel unworthy or feel rejected. Amen.**