

When I was growing up, I spent a lot of time in the garage with my dad. He was a woodworker, and loved making things. He created furniture and toys, he crafted replacement parts for all kinds of things—from vehicles to tools—out of wood. He made a set of wooden key cupboards with glass doors for us and each of the grandparents.

While he was busy with that, I mostly spent my time playing made-up games in the corner or playing with chunks of scrap wood and tools that I couldn't break, though I was also an extra set of hands when he needed to hold something steady or to catch a long piece after a cut on the table saw.

I'd like to say that I learned how to work wood from him, but I really didn't. I wasn't out there because I was interested in learning. He didn't allow me out there, suffering my frequent distractions, because I was such an invaluable helper. I was there because I loved him, and he wanted me there because he loved me. I was there because we were together.

But because we were out there together, because of the love that kept me there even when I was more hindrance than help, something happened. His love formed me. It made me who I am. I may not have learned much about woodworking, but I did learn what different tools were and what they did and how to use them safely. I did learn that many of the things we buy can be easily made, and I learned that I had the ability to make them. I learned to see things as their constituent parts and imagine how they fit together.

There are, of course, many other ways in which the love of both of my parents formed me, but this is the example that comes to mind this week as I've been busy in my own garage, repairing and maintaining beehives in preparation for the arrival of more honeybees this month—beehives I used some of his tools to help make. Those hives are reminders to me that part of him is in me still, because part of me is him.

I think about this tonight as we read St. John's story. "Do you know what I have done to you?" Jesus asks. Of course they don't. Of course we don't. I didn't understand what Dad was doing to me by letting me hang out in the garage with him; I'm starting to now, but I suspect I still don't, not really. I suspect that, when the baby comes, I'll those evenings spent with my dad in the garage will take on an entirely new and different meaning.

That's why calling what Jesus gives his disciples tonight a "commandment" is somewhat misleading. The Hebrew word is *torah*, the same name by which the Scriptures are called. It means 'commandment,' yes, but it can also mean 'law' 'teaching' or 'wisdom' or 'guidance.' The commandment he gives is to love one another as they have been loved; but the real *torah* is what he does before that.

Before the Passover—the commemoration of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt—Jesus sat down to eat with his friends. He knew the time had come to depart. He knew that one of them would betray him. But he also knew where he came from and where he was going. He knew who he was—who he was in God. And he knew that, in light of all that was about to happen, the choice was his to decide what happened at this meal. Knowing all this, the choice he made was to get up, strip to his underwear, and wash his disciples' feet—an act so embarrassing and lavish that Peter is not only embarrassed for his teacher, but ashamed to have this thing done for himself.

And Jesus chooses to do this thing not just for Peter, not just for James and John, not just for Thaddeus and Bartholomew and Nathaniel and Levi, but for Judas—the one he knew would betray him. He chooses to do this because he truly loves them—all of them, even Judas—so. damn. much. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." And he loves them because that's who he is; and he knows it.

On this night, as Jesus prepares to share this meal with his friends and remember with them all that God has done for their ancestors, Jesus knows that Love is who he is because it is who and what God is—and everything God has made. The Love he demonstrates tonight and in the days to come is the same Love in which and from which God formed light and dry land, the plants of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures in the sea. It is the same Love God breathed into the nostrils of the mud figure in the garden. Jesus knows that this Love is where he has come from, and it is what he is returning; and in that knowledge, he surrenders himself to that love, giving himself to his disciples, to Judas, to us, to the world that cries for his blood.

By pouring himself out like this for his friends, he is forming them in that Love. He is shaping who they will become and where their lives will go, just like that time in the garage with my dad shaped me, made me the person I am. That's what God's love does: it creates.

When he “commands” his disciples to love as they have been loved, he is inviting them to practice that Love, to find who they really are: that a part of him lives on in them because a part of each of them *is* him, *is* God. He invites them to find him abiding in them as he abides with the Father, and to know that this abiding, this Love that creates all things *is* who they really are. He is inviting them to experience and bear witness to this guiding principle of creation, the fundamental law of existence.

Of course, our love is not as perfect as Jesus'. Most of the time, we're not capable of loving as we have been loved, of totally giving ourselves to another and totally receiving another in return. Mostly, our love is a pitiful imitation, a broken replica, a faint echo of the Love in which we have been formed. Next to the love of God, our attempts at love are childish crayon drawings on napkins hanging next to Renaissance frescoes and French Impressionist paintings. They are 'Hot Cross Buns'

screechily played on plastic recorder next to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Bach's Moonlight Sonata. They are the crooked two-by-four into which a little boy has haphazardly pounded a handful of bent nails sitting atop the handsome oak cabinet crafted by his father.

And that is their beauty. Our love, as imperfect and limited as it is, bears witness to the Love in which it has its source. Our love—even when it falls short and does harm and even kills—speaks of the Love from which we are formed. Jesus invites us to surrender to this love, to pour ourselves out in it over and over again so that, in losing ourselves, we may find who we truly are in God, who we truly are in Love; that we may find Christ abiding in us and we in him, all of us united in the One from Whom we have all come and to Whom we are all returning.

Knowing this, knowing where we have come from and where we are going, knowing that the Father has given all things into our hands, what choices will we make? How might this love be changing us? What has this Love done to us that we may not even yet understand?

This week, in light of this *torah*, we ponder this Love together: Love that speaks light into being and breathes life into dust; Love that conquers armies and parts seas; Love that washes the feet of friends and betrayers alike; Love that gives itself for our food and drink. Love that forgives all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love that pours itself out, taking the form of a slave, humbling itself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Love that dies that we might live, and lives that we might die.