

Maundy Thursday, Year B
John 13:1-17, 31b-35
April 9, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, CA

The Ties That Bind:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

There's a hymn I just can't get out of my mind. Perhaps you know it—Blest Be the Tie That Binds. It's one of the first hymns I ever learned by heart. It goes like this

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love
The fellowship of kindred hearts
Is like to that above.

Every time I hear the hymn playing in my head, I get a picture of kindred hearts gathered around a table. Sometimes it's the thanksgiving table of my childhood; sometimes it's friends gathered around a dinner table in Marin; and sometimes it's the people gathered around this communion table.

I find myself wondering what goes into those ties that bind hearts in love?

*Kindred hearts like those of Peter and Andrew and James and John and
Mary of Magdela and Salome and Peter's mother-in-law and Mary and Jesus
*Hearts like yours and mine and all who gather at this table

How do hearts get bound in love?

Fairy tales and the folks at Harlequin Romance would have us believe that something just sweeps people off their feet. Sure, there might be some difficulty to overcome, but love quickly triumphs and remains steady to the end.

But I don't think it happens that way. I think there's more to binding hearts in love.

There are Fundamentalist Christians who would say, "Accept Jesus as your personal savior, and your heart will be bound with all other Christian hearts."

I don't think it's as simple as all of that. I think there's more to it. More to the ties that bind hearts in Christian love.

More to the story of ties that bind the disciples to one another and to Jesus. And more to the story of the ties that bind us to one another and to God.

Remember the disciples' story. Remember the journey that brought them to that table—the moments of fear and indecision; the times they wondered just what Jesus was all about; their competitiveness and their angling for position and power. Remember, too, the amazing moments in the journey—the time Jesus stilled the waters that threatened to flood the disciples' boat, the day 12 loaves of bread fed 5000 hungry people, the day four

guys crashing through the roof. Remember the hard times—the challenges Jesus faced on a regular basis; the tension between Peter and Jesus; stern warnings and rebukes. Remember, too, the many gifts of love they received along the way. All forming ties that bound them to one another.

So it is with us as well. We, too, have ties that bind our hearts in love—ties formed in flush times and in lean times too; ties forged in the crucible of hard times; ties made stronger through shared laughter and shared tears; ties woven with the threads of memory and of hope. Ties that bind us to one another.

Jesus says to his disciples, Jesus says to us, “I give you a new commandment. Love one another.” Love is the tie that binds Christian hearts and other hearts as well. A tie that comes, not all at once, but in fits and starts. One that grows stronger through times of adversity and challenge.

The trick about this tie that binds is that it’s not up to us to weave that tie. Not really. You see, that tie that binds our hearts in Christian love, is one woven with the threads of God’s love and God’s grace. Our job is simply to open up our hearts and receive that love. God does the rest.

Remember that hymn I told you about. It ends like this.

Before our Father’s throne,
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
our mutual burdens bear;
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love
The fellowship of kindred hearts
Is like to that above.