

Sandra Brown  
Maundy Thursday Reflection  
John 13:1-17, 31-34  
April 18, 2019

On Monday night, the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris caught fire. To see the flames and smoke shooting up out of this magnificent holy place, even if we'd never been there, never seen it in person, was like being punched in the stomach. For one evening, the media pressed the pause button on covering politics, and turned their gaze to this scene of the burning roof, and the toppling spire, and the people of France watching, hands over their mouths, gasping in horror, as firefighters gave their all to save the towers and the many treasures inside the cathedral. We learned that by the time the fire was extinguished, the entire structure was only 15 to 30 minutes away from being totally destroyed. We breathed a sigh of relief when we realized that so much of the building, including the three rose windows, would survive.

What was it about Notre Dame that inspired this reaction in so many of us? My husband Rod and I have never been there, yet both of us were glued to the TV Monday night, and grateful with the rest of the world that the damage wasn't worse than it was.

Notre Dame is precious because it is so massive, so structurally astounding, with its flying buttresses and gargoyles, and its once-soaring roof. It is precious because it is so beautiful, and it is precious because it is so OLD. Construction on Notre Dame began more than 850 years ago, in the year 1156. Notre Dame was already 300 years old when Columbus discovered America, and 600 years old when the Declaration of Independence was written. Our nation hasn't even had its 250<sup>th</sup> birthday yet. I imagine that many people who have visited Notre Dame, or worshiped there, must have felt a sense of reverence, and awe, and a connection with

human history that is hard to put into words. Great sacred art does that. We encounter it, and our whole being responds with “Wow . . .”

We are gathered this evening as part of a congregation that is a mere 160 years old, in a building that is only a century or so old. But the sacrament we share this evening goes back nearly 2,000 years, and right now, millions of Christians around the globe are sharing it, too, in remembrance of this night. At this meal, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment: Love one another, just as I have loved you. How has he loved them? By washing their feet. By a practical, hands-on act of service and kindness. People will know that we are followers of Jesus by the concrete things we do to show love for one another.

Yesterday, I was here at the church, happened to run into a church member who is a member of our Congregational Development Team. You may not know this, but one of this team’s ministries is to show kindness to the employees of the daycare that operates on our premises Monday through Friday. So this church member had gone and purchased little potted flowers for each daycare employee, so they would have something beautiful for Easter, and then she came around and made sure every church staff member got one, too, and when she realized she didn’t have enough, she went back to Aldi’s and got some more. It was a small gesture, but her thoughtfulness and enthusiasm, combined with the little potted plants, made it precious and beautiful.

Earlier this week, I left church for the day, and pulled out of the parking lot onto 8<sup>th</sup> street to head home, and noticed a member of the Property Committee, bending over and hard at work in the landscaping around the playground, cleaning it up and getting everything in shape for Easter Sunday.

Last Sunday, I watched a newcomer enter our church. He looked like he might be someone who has a bit of a tough life. And I watched the way people welcomed him, and greeted him with a smile, and made sure he had people to sit with during fellowship time after church. When you smiled, he smiled, and oh, how beautiful that was. And I saw a couple who as long as I can remember has always attended the 8:30 service, but has recently been attending the 10:30 service, in order to provide transportation for a couple of our members who attend the 10:30 service but can't drive anymore.

I think about the patience that I've seen you show, when you hear an aging friend tell the same story for the sixth or seventh time. I think about the way you give so generously to people in need, the compassion you show when someone has lost a loved one, the forgiveness you offer when someone says something hurtful and dumb . . . and I think, wow. WOW.

Every time we show love for one another in these practical, concrete ways, we build something precious and beautiful together. When we gather for communion, we continue something sacred that goes back thousands of years. No fire can destroy the beams of loving service that we offer one another.

Notre Dame is beautiful, and awe-inspiring. It is one-of-a-kind. It is a precious treasure for all humankind. And so are you, all of you, when we love one another as Christ has loved us. Thanks be to God.