

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Each evening at Shekinah each church gathers together for family time. It is usually a time of reflection on the theme of the event. Each night I had a different book that I was supposed to read to our youth. The books were *I love you Stinky Face* and *You are Special*. Both of these books emphasized that your parent or your maker would always love you. I especially liked *You are Special*.

In *You Are Special*, the creator, Eli created wooden people called Wemmicks. Wemmicks had golden star and gray dot stickers that they could place on each other. The golden star stickers were for people that were pretty. The gray dots were for the Wemmicks that had blemishes or chipped paint. One of the Wemmicks, Punchinello received many gray dots from others. He eventually stayed to himself or only with other Wemmicks that had gray dots. Eventually Punchinello met another Wemmick with no dots named Lucia and she shared with him that her stickers don't stick because she only cares what Eli thinks of her. Punchinello went to go see Eli. Eli told Punchinello that he loved him very much and it shouldn't matter what the other Wemmicks think of him. Punchinello believed that Eli loved him and a gray dot fell off.

We could interpret this story in a variety of ways. The goal of the story at Shekinah was for the youth to realize that God loves you no matter what others might think of you.

I also think we can look at it from the standpoint that we are all like Wemmicks from time to time and place golden star and gray dot stickers on people in our community. I know that I have a tendency to place gold stars and gray dots on people. We all have certain expectations of how we should be in community. We want a community full of love – we tend not to want any messes or any conflict. Our human nature gets in the way. We want things to be our way, the way that we feel the most comfortable.

Sometimes we are so busy labeling people that we forget about Jesus' commandment to love one another. We might put gold stars on people who have the same ideas as us or people we naturally get along with. We might put gray dots on people who challenge us to think in a different way. We might put a gray dot on someone who has a different ethnic background than we do. Whatever our reasons are for giving someone a gold star or a gray dot – the question that I've been struggling with – am I, are we loving one another as Christ loved us.

Jesus gave us a perfect example of mutual love when he washed the disciples' feet. He was their Lord, their master and he knelt down and took on a humble act of service. He washed the disciples' feet. He washed Peter's feet, even though Peter challenged him and he didn't understand. As far as we as far as we know, he washed Judas' feet. He knew that Judas was going to betray him and that's why he said one of the disciples was unclean.

Jesus set an example. He washed the disciples' feet. He took the job of a servant. He didn't have to, but he did. In this humble act of service he taught the disciples, he teaches us to be humble and to care for all – even those who hurt you or betray you.

We are all different, but as disciples Jesus gave us a commandment “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Being part of a community is challenging. It is tempting to put gold stars and gray dots on the people who surround us. As disciples we are to love one another for who we are: Children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.