

Jesus' Love Lesson

John 13

February 19, 2023

Please open your Bibles today to John 13. If you knew you were only going to be with your family for a few more hours, what would you do and say during the time you had? Jesus found Himself in that exact situation, we'll find out today what He chose to do and how that might affect us.

Last week we began our journey through Holy Week to the cross and the resurrection. We welcomed King Jesus with loud Hosannas as He steered His donkey through the Passover crowd, down the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem. We talked about some of the dynamics at work and how Jesus was purposefully, obviously, and openly proclaiming Himself to be the Messiah. Although many welcomed Him, sadly others turned away. As we mentioned last week, John probably knows that the other three gospels have already been written and doesn't bother to include many events that they do. On Monday, for example, Matthew tells us that Jesus cleared the temple further angering the Jewish leaders. On Tuesday He taught His Disciples probably about His return and end times, while we're not exactly sure what He did on Wednesday.

Today then, we catch up with Him on Thursday evening as He sits down to share the Passover feast with His Disciples. Again, the other writers tell us how He had them make arrangements for this meal in an upper room. After they were all there, John tells us what happens next in 13:1-5. If you are able, please stand, "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the **full extent** of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

There is so much to unpack in this chapter I wish we had about 3 hours instead of 30 minutes. But let's get started. John is writing this in retrospect, looking back years later reflecting on what had happened. The events and their impact have had some time to ripen and the colors of their true meaning have fully developed. So He not only includes what happened but some interpretation of it as well.

We find in verse 1 that Jesus knew his own timetable. He knew He would be leaving His disciples later that evening and crucified the very next morning. If you knew you were only going to be with your family for a few more hours, what would you do and say? Jesus did know. So He carefully selected His final words and His final actions. He

had loved His disciples over the past three years but now He would show them the full extent of His love—the summit, the pinnacle which we'll get to in a minute.

In Verse 2 we learn that it's the evening meal. We've moved our Love Feast to noon but we remember this was supertime. Although Da Vinci painted them like this 1500 years later, they were probably gathered around what was known as a triclinium. A triclinium was a three sided couch where people reclined on their left sides and ate with their right hands off of the center table. These were common at the time and some of them have been found both indoors and out. It was customary to have 3 on a side so they might have added a fourth side to get all 13 around the same table. This would present a bit of a challenge for our Deacons.

Verse 3 demonstrates clearly that Jesus knew who He was, what He was doing, and where He was going. **All things** were under His power. He had come from the Father and was returning to the Father shortly, reminiscent of what John wrote in chapter 1, the Word was with God and the word was God. So knowing His power, His position, and His purpose, what does Jesus do with all of it? He lays it aside. He stoops down and He washes their feet. That wouldn't be my first choice or even among my top 10. But this is how Jesus chose to show the full extent of His love.

Verse 4 is really an illustration of the incarnation. He took off or laid aside His outer clothing, His glory. Wrapped a towel around His waist and served. This is as clear a display of Jesus' purpose as ever there was. We marvel at Him becoming a servant here, but after having already laid aside His heavenly glory to come to earth, this was but a visible demonstration. Jesus had already stooped to come to earth. He washed humanity's feet His whole life. And this event that night had a major impact on John. Perhaps the other gospel writers were too embarrassed to include it, but not John, the one Jesus loved. He knew its truth and its power and its depth.

We're all likely familiar with the custom at the time for the lowest servant to wash the feet of guests who entered a home. It was necessary because people wore open sandals on dirt roads contaminated with donkey, horse, camel, and sometimes even human manure. Many farmers take off their shoes when they come in from the barn to keep the smell and the mess out of the house. But no one had done this in the Upper room that night. And no one wanted to. From time to time the disciples had argued over which of them was the most important though none of them campaigned for the least. So they were sitting around the table about to eat the Passover meal with the stench and the stain of filthy feet.

It's also significant that the Jewish priests had to wash their feet before the entered the Tabernacle. Here were these 12 Disciples, about to enter the holiest place in their relationship with Jesus and they would need clean feet. They were about to witness

the highest sacrifice of all, but they were unprepared. And so He stooped and scrubbed 24 feet and 120 toes. He likely went around the outside of the triclinium washing and drying with the towel wherewith He was girded.

Although we often recognize that Jesus was teaching humility and service, and He was, let's not miss His primary motivation. Say Love. This is how He showed them the full extent not of His humility, nor of His service, but of His love. His only act of love that would surpass this one would be His death tomorrow morning for their sins and ours. Each toe scrub, each heel rub was a visible, tangible, concrete demonstration of Jesus' love.

Friends, love doesn't just feel. Love does. Love washes feet, changes diapers, scrubs commodes, changes oil, fixes meals. Love washes dishes, pumps septic tanks, and does what Mike Rowe calls, Dirty Jobs. Not as a martyr, but as a gift-giver. As a lover. As a true friend. We highlight the service and humility of feet washing and that is true. But John is clear that this is the way Jesus showed them the full extent of His **love**. Jesus had saved His most important Kingdom lesson for last. Love, humility, and service are all inseparably connected.

I came across a story from an anonymous writer that described what they found in a Minnesota church. The leaders there said, "We want our members to wear aprons, not bibs." They went on to explain that bibs are for people who only want to be fed. Bibs are for those who are not yet ready or willing to feed themselves. Bibs are for those who are more interested in being served than in serving. Bibs are for babes in the faith, those who haven't caught God's vision for the church, or those who are not yet of the faith.

Aprons on the other hand, they said, are for those who have a heart to serve others in Jesus' name. Aprons are for those who know that they are the church. Aprons are for those who don't mind getting their hands dirty. Aprons are for those who take time daily to feed their own spiritual hunger. Aprons are for those who are growing in faith, and want to help others grow. Aprons are for those who truly love Jesus and others. Aprons are for those who wash feet.

When consultant, Win Arn asked thousands of American Christians why they thought the church existed, 88 percent of us said, "The church exists to serve my needs and the needs of my family." Almost 9 out of every 10 American Christians are wearing bibs. But Jesus wore an apron and called His followers to wear aprons. Every believer ought to be looking for ways to wash others' feet in order to show them love. Whose feet can I wash today and how? Maybe by repairing their car or by cleaning their home or providing child care or mowing their grass or whatever.

I'm so thankful for many many footwashers and apron wearers and lovers at Antioch. Not just around the Love Feast Table, but in many ways. We have so many who do so many jobs around here without any recognition or credit. Week in and week out, year in and year out. Serving each of us in untold ways. Many behind the scenes. Our greeters and livestreamers, our musicians and those who change the sign, those who teach our SS classes or help with BLAST. Those who fix food and clean up after meals. Those who trim our trees or our roses. Those who carry our trash to the dumpsters or do the weedeating. People who serve without payment or go over and above their job descriptions. Those who count our offerings each week and those who set our thermostats. Those who change our lightbulbs and clean our commodes. Those who crawl around under the stage to repair wires and run new ones. Those who print our bulletins and balance our checkbook. And those who pray faithfully and regularly. And so many others. Thank each of you for following Jesus' example and washing our feet. You look beautiful in your aprons!

Those of you who read the Daily Bread devotional will discover that this Wednesday, Feb 22, is Be Humble Day. The reading will reveal that before Jesus came, humility was considered a weakness to be shunned, not a virtue to be honored. We can't wash feet if our nose is in the air. Before Jesus came (BC), boasting and bragging were the way to greatness but within a hundred years of Jesus' death (AD), even non-Christian writers recognized humility as a desirable quality. Jesus changed a lot of things.

But what about those who resist? Say resist. Peter didn't want his feet washed. In the next few verses, probably out of pride, he tries to refuse the love Jesus wants to show him. Refusing the needed cleansing so that he can enter the Tabernacle of closeness. To which Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, **you have no part with Me.**" That's pretty strong! One of the old Brethren writers said that if Jesus said that today to all who refuse to come to Love Feast and have their feet washed, there would be many without Jesus. And perhaps He does. This isn't a chore to dread, an inconvenience to endure, or just a command to obey. It is a privilege we get to participate in! Both to wash and to be washed. To show love and to receive it. Down in verse 15, Jesus said, "If you know these things, you will be blessed, or happy if you **do** them." So why wouldn't we do them? Do you not want to be happy, Peter? Don't you **want** to be blessed? It reminds me of when Jesus asked the crippled man, "Do you **want** to get well?" When you can do something to advance your own happiness and blessing, why wouldn't you? Come on Peter. Wash and be washed at Love Feast.

Personally, I believe there are spiritual blessings in actually washing each others' feet. But I believe there are also spiritual blessings in showing love and service in **other** ways too. Some of which we've already mentioned. And I don't know about you, but I want **all** the spiritual blessings and **all** the happiness I can possibly get this side of heaven. The early church apparently did wash feet as Paul encouraged them to do in I

Timothy 5. I'm thankful for the heritage we have in the Brethren Church to wash each others' feet even if it is inconvenient and uncomfortable.

Especially when it was both demonstrated and commanded by our Lord and Teacher. A teacher sets the example the students are to follow and a Lord gives commands for his subjects to obey. Jesus did both. He set an example of feetwashing and He commanded it. When I taught students how to weld, we went over welding in the classroom and I told them how to do it, what was happening, etc. But then I actually welded so they would see how it was to be done. I showed them by example. And then, each of them had to weld. I commanded them. Jesus told us how and why to love and serve each other, then He showed us how to love and serve each other and then He commanded them and us, "Do it. Now that I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." So just do it.

And He left no one out. Jesus' love demonstration was for all of them and all of us. And we are to pass it on. I'm going to paraphrase what Max Lucado wrote in his book Grace. He observes that instead of skipping Philip for questioning His ability to feed the 5000+ hungry people, Jesus washed his doubting feet anyway. "James and John lobbied for cabinet-level positions in Christ's kingdom. So what does Jesus do when people use [Him] for personal advancement? He slides a basin in their direction. Peter quit trusting Christ in the storm. He tried to talk Christ out of going to the cross. Within hours Peter would curse the very name of Jesus and hightail his way into hiding. In fact, all 24 of Jesus' followers' feet would soon scoot, leaving Jesus to face his accusers alone. Do you ever wonder what Jesus does with promise breakers? He washes their feet.

Lucado continues, "And Judas. The lying, conniving, greedy rat who sold Jesus down the river for a pocket of cash." We learned up in verse 2 that the Devil had already prompted him to betray Jesus. Whether or not he had made his final decision, we don't know, but he will in the next hour or so. "Jesus won't wash his feet, will he? Sure hope not. If He washes the feet of His Judas, you will have to wash the feet of yours. Your betrayer...[your] good for nothing villain. Jesus' Judas walked away with 30 pieces of silver. Your Judas walked away with your virginity, security, spouse, job, childhood, retirement, investments." Yes. Jesus loved Judas too and He washed his feet right along with all the others. And Jesus desires to wash yours too. Regardless of what you've done. If you're Peter, Philip, Thomas, or now Judas. He wants you to enter the Tabernacle of His presence. He wants to cleanse you and scrub away not just the sin of betrayal and causing pain, but also the hurt and pain that others have caused you. And when He does, we are to pass it on.

If you've been baptized, you've had your bath and you don't need to be rebaptized. But like the disciples, we all need our feet washed from time to time. I encourage you to come to the Lord's Table on Palm Sunday to do that in obedience to our Lord and Teacher that we may know His blessing and His happiness. And today to

allow Jesus to come to your seat and sponge away your sin and your pain. To cleanse and make you whole. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Come as we pray today.