

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: *The Preparation and Passion of the Messiah*
***Birth of the New Testament Church - John 13-21*)**

John 13:1-17
Love on its Knees

We live in a society obsessed with finding “true love,” but tragically ignorant of what it is they are seeking. Sadly, for many, their version of love is totally self focused, shamelessly manipulative, and a means to self gratification. Not surprisingly then, the relationships that are formed seldom last. In sharp contrast, the Bible speaks of love in terms of self-sacrifice and humble service. True love pursues the interests of others instead of its own interests and longs to meet the needs of others instead of meeting its own needs. Katharine Hepburn, in her life story, describes love by saying: “*Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get — only with what you are expecting to give — which is everything.*” That sounds about right.

As we come to our text, Jesus and his disciples are about to celebrate their last Passover together. Christ’s public ministry has now ended. For the most part, the nation of Israel has rejected the Light of the World and so Christ hides himself from them indicating God’s imminent judgment (which would come with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.) and the plunging of Israel as a nation into darkness. Even one of Christ’s own disciples has rejected Christ and will soon betray him. The time had come for his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.

As they prepare for the Passover meal, the disciples are nervous and fearful of the Jewish leader’s plot to kill Jesus. Jesus, knowing their anxious hearts, will now demonstrate in the most profound way one final proof of his love for them. After all, is it not the love of God and the Christ-like love of others that often gets us through the dark and difficult times of our life? Yes it is, and what *we will discover in our text is four truths concerning Christ’s love for us:*

I. He loves us intensely to the very end (13:1-2).

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him...

Speaking of his disciples, the text says that Christ loves them “to the end.” The fact that Jesus washed Judas’ feet knowing that the devil has already convinced Judas to betray him is absolute proof of the amazing greatness of his love for his disciples. Jesus meets the greatest injury and insult imaginable with humble servant like love. Wow! What a contrast between the love of Jesus and the selfishness of Judas!

Jesus is readying his disciples for their mission to the world. And the one thing that he wants them to be absolutely sure of is his love. The phrase “to the end” has a dual meaning. Jesus will love them to their last breath and he will love them with the highest intensity - fully and completely. The idea is that there will never be a moment when God does not love you perfectly, completely, to the fullest extent! God’s love is not conditioned upon our actions. He will never love you any less than he loves you now and he could never love you anymore than he loves you now.

There was much joy and suffering ahead for the disciples just as there will be much joy and suffering ahead for you as a believer. But you have the absolute assurance that Christ will love you to the fullest extent through every moment of your existence. Dale Hahn encouraged his son Cory at his tee ball and Little League games. He continued to cheer Cory on all the way through high school, often playing catch in the driveway and working on Cory's swing. All of that dedication paid off. During his senior year in High School, Cory received California's distinguished "Mr. Baseball" award. Cory declined a \$300,000 salary offer from the San Diego Padres so he could hone his skills at Arizona State University on a full scholarship. And just like those early tee ball days, his dad was still his biggest fan and most devoted coach. But Cory's future plans shattered during his third game at Arizona State. As he was sliding head first into second base, Cory broke his neck. Today he's a C5 quadriplegic, paralyzed from the chest down. He has limited use of his

hands and arms. The kid who once led his team to a high school championship by pitching five perfect innings, making an over-the-shoulder catch, and hitting a long home run, now battles to eat hamburgers, wash his hair, and wheel to class. Cory says, "My goals don't take days anymore, they take weeks, they take months." But, as always, Cory is able to stretch toward those goals from the broad shoulders of the guy he calls Pops. "There were times I would wonder, what's better, being dead or being like this?" Cory says. "But then I look up and see my dad and think, *If he can do it, I can do it.*" When Cory moved back to the Arizona State campus to continue his studies, Dale moved into an extended-stay hotel down the street. Together they get Cory ready for his daily classes. Each day brings a little more independence for Cory. Recently, they celebrated that Cory was using his once-lifeless hands to wash his own hair. Cory is also able to feed himself only after countless days of practicing with his dad. "It was really messy," Cory said, "but we did it." Together they drive to campus in Dale's truck, where they go from a street parking spot to Cory's first class, with Cory wheeling himself most of the way. Dale says, "I see all these college kids running and skating across campus, and then I see Cory just chugging along in his chair, the world moving past him ... and I am so, so proud of him." After lunch, they go to a gym for therapy, and then his father might drop him off at a Sun Devils baseball practice or game before taking him home for the night. Cory will hang out with friends until about 11 P.M., at which point his father returns to his room to lay him into bed and put the television on a timer and slip out with a simple, "Good night, buddy." "When you're a dad, you're a dad forever," Dale says. **God is your dad, an even greater Dad, and he will love you forever no matter what!**

II. His love stoops to serve you (13:3-5)

³ *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,* ⁴ *rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.* ⁵ *Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

Right away we ask, “Why all this attention on Christ’s authority and exaltation?” It is because John wants you to know that the one who is the sovereign Lord of the universe, the one with such power and status that he could have defeated the devil instantaneously and devastated Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath, this one stoops and does the unthinkable, the unconscionable, the objectionable, that which was highly offensive in washing the disciple’s feet including the feet of his own betrayer. Only slaves, only the lowest of servants, did this kind of work! No rabbi would’ve been caught dead doing it. But we are reminded that the Lord Jesus did not come to be served but to serve. He said that the greatest among us are those who choose to be servants. Oh how the disciples, who just been arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom, must have watched in awkward, painful silence, as Christ, clad as a slave, knelt before each of them and wash their soiled feet.

What an admonition to us today when often many in the church engage in a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest and who will receive the most praise. As Andrew Murray wrote, “Humility is the only soil in which the graces root.” It would do us all well to remember that Christ not only came to serve, at this very moment Christ is serving us, and in many ways will be serving us throughout all eternity.

III. His sacrificial love has provided for your cleansing from sin (13:6-11).

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸ Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

Peter's revulsion to what Christ had done was perfectly understandable in that culture. The highly honored position of teacher or rabbi precluded such lowly behavior. Jesus explains that although Peter did not understand now, he would understand later. He is probably referring to both Christ's explanation of the foot washing in the immediate future, and the Holy Spirit's illumination of Jesus' teaching after Pentecost.

I believe that Jesus is teaching several things here: 1) that the only way you can have a relationship with Jesus and can be a part of his family is if you receive the washing or spiritual cleansing that comes with regeneration; 2) that there are two types of spiritual cleansing involving judicial and family forgiveness (God removes all the guilt of all of our sins at the moment of salvation providing a total and complete forgiveness. We stand before God as if we were sinless clothed in the righteousness of Christ who lived the perfect life for us. But we also need daily cleansing or family forgiveness. That is, in order to enjoy daily intimacy and fellowship with Christ we need to confess those sins that we have committed. Just as we will always be the son of our father, we still need to make things right, from time to time, if we do not want to hinder the intimacy of relationship with our earthly father.) 3) and that just as you don't need a complete physical bath when only your feet are dirty, the complete cleansing of the redeemed at salvation never needs to be repeated.

Jesus concludes with a loving warning to Judas. Not every one of his disciples had received the cleansing of salvation. Judas had received a physical cleaning of his feet but had not received a spiritual cleansing since his actions would prove that he did not have an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. He was the unclean disciple.

IV. His love demands a suitable response from you (13:12-17).

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to

you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

1. Just as Christ served his Father, so should we serve Christ.

We are Christ emissaries and messengers to the world. And messengers and servants should not think themselves exempt from tasks performed by their superiors.

2. Just as Christ valued the lowly thing so should we.

The major difference between Jesus and the world in which he lived was not the concept of leaving an example, but the nature of this example. Whereas the Greeks and Romans prized virtues such as courage or military prowess, Jesus exemplified humility, self-sacrifice, and love. No disciple of Jesus should think it beneath him (or her) to serve others since Jesus, their master and the one who sent them, humbled himself to serve in the lowliest of ways. It should not be beneath us to serve the homeless, those outside our comfort zone, or even those we might believe to be our enemies. Remember, Jesus washed Judas's feet.

3. Knowing what we ought to do and doing it are two different things.

Jesus promised God's blessing on those who practice humble service, not on those who simply realize that they should be humble. Carson writes, "There is a form of religious piety that utters a hearty "Amen!" to the most stringent demands of discipleship, but which rarely does anything about them." God extends amazing grace and provision to those who are willing to do the unthinkable, the unacceptable, and the objectionable in serving others. And Jesus is there as you serve, serving through you and right alongside of you.

Conclusion

God loves you intensely through every moment of your existence, now and forever! God has, and will stoop to the lowest point possible in sending his Son and in his daily acts of compassion towards you. We will never know this side of eternity how indescribable and extravagant his love has been in cleansing us from every single sin. And so it only makes sense that our reaction be to model that same humble love every moment of this life. Every thought, every word, every action must

exemplify a spirit of humility and a burning desire to love as Jesus loved and loves us. A study found that MS patients did better when instead of being served through multiple types of therapy, they were given small ways to serve others in the community. A team of researchers from the University of Michigan and Yale studied how people in unglamorous jobs coped with their often devalued work. When the researchers tried to think of supposedly unrewarding jobs to study, they chose hospital janitors. But what they learned from their studies took them completely by surprise. When the researchers interviewed the cleaning staff of a major hospital in the Midwest, they discovered that a certain subset of housekeepers didn't see themselves as part of the janitorial staff at all. They saw themselves as part of the professional staff, as part of the healing team. And that changed everything. These people would get to know the patients and their families and would offer support in small but important ways: a box of Kleenex here, a glass of water there, or a word of encouragement. One housekeeper reported rearranging pictures on the walls of comatose patients, with the hope that a change of scenery might have some positive effect. The researchers coined a term for what these special housekeepers brought to their job—*job crafting*. Job crafting means that people take their existing job expectations—or job descriptions—and expand them to suit their desire to make a difference. Job crafters are those who do what's expected (because it's required) and then find a way to add something new to their work. Something that delights. Something that benefits both the giver and the receiver. One of the lead researchers put it this way: "People who job-craft don't just reshape their jobs to make life better for themselves, but to serve others in some beneficial way." They desire to make life better for others. Whose “dirty feet” are you willing to wash this week?