

Gospel of John – March 27, 2022

If you can believe it, this is week 8 of our sermon series about the gospel of John. It is a provocative and kind of in-your-face book which puts Jesus in very stark terms. Light and dark. Life and death.

So far John has presented Jesus as a miracle worker who raises the dead, who speaks with the authority of God himself. He presents Jesus as the very Word of God, through whom everything was created. And he challenges us, as readers, **to pick a side**.

This is Jesus, the Messiah. The Son of God. *Do you believe it?*

Now, if you look at the flow of the book you see this **narrative crescendo**.

It starts with Jesus turning water to wine at a wedding party in rural Galilee, but as every chapter goes by, the **heat gets turned up**, opposition to Jesus grows, everything's moving towards Jerusalem and Jesus' crucifixion...

When we come to chapter 13, the story is reaching a **boiling point**.

But then John does something interesting. He slows the narrative *way* down, and he **zooms in on a single moment** - the next four chapters are all about the things Jesus did and said the night before he was crucified. It all takes place at what we call the "Last Supper."

It's like we're at the top of a **roller coaster** and everything stops for a second right before we take the big plunge.

Why does John do this?

Well, as we'll see for over the next three weeks, this Last Supper in John is where all the threads of the book get drawn together.

Here we see **what Jesus himself cares about most** at a crucial moment in his life.

We see the very core of his identity. And we see Jesus setting the stage for all that will come after - the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the launching of the Church.

So let's dive in. Today we'll see **how the Last Supper begins** in John... Not with words, but with action.

SETTING THE STAGE

Go ahead and turn with me to **John 13:1, Page ____**

[PRAY]

John 13:1-3

Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God.

Pause for a second.

I don't want to miss how John sets this moment up. Look at the end of verse 1.

What we are about to see is Jesus loving his disciples "to the very end." Now, this could mean that he loved them "all the way to the last possible moment."

But more likely, this means he loved them "to the fullest extent possible." Now he loved them to the very end. To the uttermost...

And then look at verse 3. "Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God." The next word is "So..."

In other words, what we are about to see is Jesus acting out the God-given authority he has - over *everything* (remember he's the Word of God) - and at the same time demonstrating the love he has for his disciples to the extreme.

The king of the universe is about to show us what true love looks like.

WASHING FEET

John 13:3-11

Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

"No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So, with all the authority in the world - authority over *everything* - having come from God and returning to God - loving his disciples to the very end... Jesus washes their feet.

Ew.

At least, that's how we react today. But I don't even think we realize just how nasty of a job this would have been.

We live in a world of carpet, concrete, and socks. **Our feet are pretty clean.** But when you spend your entire day outside in the dust and the dirt in open-toed shoes, your feet get pretty nasty!

At home my favorite go-to footwear for hanging out around the farm are these old **Crocs** I've had for 15 years or something. They're all torn up. When Cleo was a puppy she chewed off the back straps, so I can't even

put them into 4-wheel drive mode anymore. But I still wear them all the time.

And I've got to tell you. When I've spent a whole day working outside in my Crocs cleaning the chicken coop or clearing out pig droppings or even just working in the garden, I come back and **my feet are so dirty**.

So imagine living in the ancient world where you walked everywhere in sandals and there *was* no carpet and concrete. **Dirty feet were something everybody had to deal with.**

Now, undoubtedly common people washed their own feet all the time - just a part of your normal hygiene. But if you were a guest in someone's home, or attending a big dinner feast, the host would often have your feet washed for you.

Well, guess who got *that* job? The **lowest or least important servant** or slave you could find. Because it's gross. It's demeaning work. Even symbolically, your feet are the **lowest and least dignified part of your body**.

So imagine the **shock and discomfort** of the disciples when Jesus gets up from the table to do the job himself. He wraps a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, and starts washing their feet. One by one.

Think of how long this would have taken. Even if it was just the 12 disciples here (and it could have been more), if Jesus took 3 minutes per person, that's **over a half an hour!**

Half an hour of Jesus lowering himself and doing the degrading work of a servant... washing his disciples' feet.

It's no wonder **Peter recoils** at this in v.8. "No! You will never, *ever* wash my feet!"

"It isn't right. It isn't done. You're our master, our teacher, our leader, our Lord! If anyone should be having *their* feet washed, it's *you!*"

Jesus' reply is kind of intense. "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Somehow this action - this degrading act of service - is so integral to who Jesus is, that it's **part of what it means to belong to him.**

EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

So what in the world is Jesus up to here? Well, let's keep reading and see if we can get an answer.

John 13:12-17

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

"I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."

It's interesting. When you compare the gospel of John with the other three gospels, there is very little ethical or moral teaching here.

Jesus does say things in John like "obey my commands" or "follow my teachings," but those commands and teachings are not really spelled out.

Part of the reason, probably, is because by the time John was written, everybody in the Church would have been pretty familiar with the specific teachings of Jesus.

Love your enemies, care for the marginalized, forgive...

But I also think that John intentionally steers clear of specific ethical commands because he understood Jesus was not calling his followers to behavior modification. "Here's a new set of rules to follow."

No, Jesus was calling his followers to adopt **a whole new way of life.** A posture that changes the way we behave *in every circumstance.*

The posture of self-giving love. The very same posture Jesus had. The one with *all* authority lowering himself as a servant.

Philippians 2:6-8

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

What we see with Jesus washing his disciple's feet is a symbolic act of self-giving love that represented the very tangible act of self-sacrifice that would happen less than 24 hours later as Jesus dies on a cross for those who do not deserve it.

Today he's sacrificing his dignity. Tomorrow he's sacrificing his life.

This is the posture of self-giving love Jesus wants his followers to adopt. "Do as I have done to you."

A few verses later, in verse 34, Jesus says this:

John 13:34-35

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

This is why Jesus tells Peter, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Because self-giving love, lowering one's self, setting yourself aside, and serving others in humility... this is **at the core of who Jesus is** and it's at the core of what it means to be his disciple.

If you want to understand Jesus, look at his towel and basin. If you want to follow Jesus, pick up your own.

Wrap a towel around your waist. Fill a basin with water. And get to work loving and serving others, whether or not they deserve it.

This is **how the world will know** that we actually follow him. That what we have going on here is actually real, and not just another moralistic religion.

THE GOD OF SELF-GIVING LOVE

I love John 13. This simple moment of humility on Jesus' part is so profound. Because it's the very essence of who he is. And I'm so glad John captures it the way he does and when he does in the story.

Because in the next few chapters we're going to see Jesus going to his death. Executed by all-powerful Rome. Seemingly defeated by the religious leaders of Israel.

But because Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he's prepared us to see the crucifixion in an entirely new light. **He's not a victim!**

No. Jesus is going to the cross willingly because it's who he is: **the God of self-giving love walking among us.**

LETTING JESUS WASH YOU

There's a lot we could take away from this moment in John. But as I've been reflecting on this passage over the last few weeks, a couple of questions have come to mind that I want to ask you.

First, **will you let Jesus wash your feet?**

And I'm not talking about Peter protesting here. If you look at John 13, there's an unspoken fact in the story that blows my mind.

Verse 2 tells us that Judas, one of the 12 disciples, was already prepared to betray Jesus. And we see in the story that Jesus knew he was going to do this.

Verse 30 tells us that "Judas left at once, going out into the night." The implication is that during this whole scene, Judas is sitting right there.

Do you realize what this means? **Jesus washed Judas' feet.**

He knew what Judas was about to do to him - he knew the betrayal, the sin, the evil that was in his heart - yet Jesus washed his feet.

Why? **Why not wait till he was gone?**

Because that is the character of our Savior. That is his posture. He doesn't just serve his friends, he doesn't just love those who've earned it. Jesus is a servant to all. Jesus died for all.

Which is why I ask, "will you let Jesus wash *your* feet?"

Now, you're probably not as broken as Judas, but I know there are an awful lot of us who feel shame because of who we are and what we've done.

What **if Jesus knew everything about you**, and still wanted to humble himself on your behalf?

What **if Jesus understood your deepest, darkest shame**, and still willingly sacrificed his life for you?

What if Jesus **knew your brokenness**, your filth, your addiction, your sin, your pain, your lies, *that thing you did that nobody knows about...*

What if he knew it all, and still wrapped a towel around his waist and stooped down to wash your dirty feet?

How would you respond to that kind of love and grace?

This isn't a hypothetical question because it's exactly what Christ did for you on the cross. He lowered himself to lift you up. You! He humiliated himself as a servant to bring *you* life.

Do you believe it? *Will* you believe it? Will you let Jesus wash your feet?

This is between you and him. **Take a moment and listen** – what is he saying to you right now?

[PAUSE]

DO AS I HAVE DONE

The second question I'd like you to reflect on is this: **What is your towel and**

basin today?

A big part of the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet is that Jesus expects his followers to serve each other in the same way he has served us. "Do as I have done to you." "Wash each others' feet."

We are called to have **the same posture of self-giving** love as Jesus.

And I know I sound like a broken record talking about this. "Yeah yeah, Barry, we get it. Self-giving love." But guys,

Mark 10:43-45

Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.

1 John 3:16-18

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

Philippians 2:5

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Maybe I *am* a broken record. But if I am it's because the Bible is too, yet this concept seems to be **the hardest for us to get through our thick skulls in this selfish time.**

We are called to a posture of self-giving love just like Jesus showed us.

Like I said before, **If you want to understand Jesus, look at his towel and basin. If you want to follow Jesus, pick up your own.**

Who are you being **called to serve** right now?

Who in your life is God calling you to lift up and elevate, even if they don't deserve it? **Whose dirty feet are yours to wash?**

Is it someone God's calling you to forgive? Someone in need God is calling you to support? Someone who gets on your nerves God is calling you to spend time with?

Picking up your towel and basin - washing the feet of others - will likely mean **giving something up**... It could be your pride. It could be your money. Your time. Maybe even your reputation.

The self-giving love of Jesus is costly, but it is the only thing that can heal this broken world.

What is your towel and basin today? Jesus loved his disciples "to the very end" by washing their feet. Are we willing to do the same?

[PRAY]