

Text: John 13:1-20 (and Philippians 2:5-11)¹
 Series: Life in His Name ... The Message of John's Gospel
 Title: Part 28 ... Love Like Jesus
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“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
Philippians 2:5-11

It was the evening, the evening before the day of days for Jesus. John tells us that...

“¹ 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, 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.” John 13:1-5

A church was presenting the story of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven as a play. They were being very dramatic and had some wonderful special effects. The most stunning effect was designed to depict Jesus' ascension into heaven, the climactic scene of the whole play. With stage hands off stage pulling on ropes, Jesus would ascend up through a hole in the ceiling and out of sight!

Everything went well. Jesus uttered his Great Commission just before the stage hands began hoisting him through the ceiling. But midway through the flight, the guys backstage lost their grip on the ropes and the Ascension began looking like the Second Coming!

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The actor playing Jesus dropped back down and nearly hit the stage, but with incredible poise, he looked at the horrified disciples and said, "Oh, and one more thing. Love one another." Then the stagehands got their grip and hoisted him through the ceiling.

Were Christ to make an unscheduled stop like that today, he might very well say, "Remember, love one another!"

The word "love" appears just 12 times in John chapter 1 through 12. But beginning in chapter 13 and heading on through chapter 21, it appears 46 times!

What has changed? You find it in verse 1: "**Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father...**" The "hour" had arrived! The hour of the cross had come.

John sets the scene for this story with some wonderful background information in the first three verses of John 13.

Jesus knew His hour – the time had come for him to "depart out of this world to the Father."

But love determined his attitude to this challenge. The pressure of knowing that the hour of death was upon him could have turned him to focus on his own stress and pain – but it didn't. He turned to address the needs of his disciples.

When we read the account in John 2 of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, we hear Jesus telling his mother, Mary, "**My hour has not yet come.**" (**John 2:4**) Jesus was aware that he had an appointment to keep – an "hour" with the cross. In John 12:23-23 Jesus declared that that appointment was now come:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12:23-24

Jesus knew that the cross was only hours away. He knew that he would lay down His life for us. He knew that he would take up his life again in resurrection. And he knew that he would ascend to be with the Father.

Jesus knew His enemy -- the devil had put it into Judas Iscariot's heart and mind to betray him.

But love determined his response to his enemy. Don't think Judas betrayal didn't hurt Jesus! Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9 to describe the betrayal...

‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ (John 13:18 quoting Psalm 41:9)

The full quotation is this...

“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” Psalm 41:9

During the US invasion of Iraq I remember watching some CNN footage of one Iraqi man, attempting to show his support for the Americans and his opposition to Saddam Hussein. He had taken his shoe and was hitting it, heel first, against the face of a wall-sized portrait of Saddam Hussein. He was “lifting up his heel” against Saddam! In the East, to show another person the sole of your foot is considered a severe insult!

The disappointment of knowing that Judas, under Satan’s prompting, was about to betray him could have so torn him that he could have collapsed inward in self-pity – but he didn’t. He turned to love him even knowing he would betray him.

Jesus knew His authority. John tells us...

**“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands...”
John 13:3**

But love determined his use of his authority. Jesus knew that he was sovereign over all. He had all the power in his hand, yet he in his hands he took up a towel, not a scepter!

Jesus knew His identity. John tells us...

“and that he had come from God and was going back to God...” John 13:3

But love shaped his use of this knowledge. He was leaving this old world behind – but his love and concern was directed to those he would leave in this world. His Father had sent him into the world because of his love for the world. And now the Son was about to love the world by giving His life.

Knowing all He knew, he turned in love towards his disciples and showed them how much he loved them! John tells us that he took up **a towel and a basin** to wash their dirty feet with love.

For years I used the New International Version translation of the Bible and something about the way the translators rendered the beginning of this story puzzled me. This is the way it read in the NIV...

“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.” John 13:1 (NIV)

How could they have referred to the washing of feet as showing his disciples “the full extent of his love”? It’s actually a possible rendering of the Greek original but it forces us to compare Jesus washing of feet with Jesus death on the cross. I’ve always thought that the greatest demonstration of the love of God was seen in the cross of Christ. That’s what Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans...

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

But if the NIV translators are correct, then John is inviting us to relate Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ to his death on the cross. ***But how can we relate washing feet to dying on a cross as a profound demonstration of love?***

I think we can. Follow me for a few minutes this morning.

Let me suggest that on one hand, there is something here that Jesus asks us to **let him do for us – something we can’t do for ourselves**. He wants us first to **allow him to express his love for us by washing us**.

And then on the other hand, He asks us to do for others **something they could do for themselves**. He wants us on the other hand, to **share His love** with others by caring for them.

Both are important and both have to go together. You really can’t have one without the other. And they have to come in the order that Jesus gives them to us here in this story.

First, let’s think together about Jesus’ unique love for us

Jesus asks us to allow Him to express his love for us by washing us

Bible scholar John Stott sees this act of foot washing as a drama that pictures the five stages of Jesus’ life and ministry that Paul also describes in Philippians 2 – the passage we read earlier. Follow Stott’s thinking with me. Stott wrote:

“[Jesus] `got up from the meal’ (v.4a), as he had risen from his throne. He `took off his outer clothing’ (v.4b), as he had laid aside his glory. He `wrapped a towel around his waist’ (v.4c), as he had taken the nature of a servant. He `poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet’ (v.5), as he had humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross. Then, `when he had finished washing their feet, he put

on his clothes and returned to his place' (v.12), as he was about to return to the Father."

This washing of feet wasn't an exercise in hygiene or social grace; nor was it only a lesson in servant hood, although it does model servant hood for us! Jesus was picturing for his disciples and for us the very reason for his coming – to bring a washing that would cleanse us inside and out through his blood poured out for us on the cross!

You get the sense that there's something momentous behind this menial act of foot washing as you follow the dialogue between Peter and Jesus.

As Jesus makes his way around the supper table, he washes the disciples' feet without objection. They are silent; perhaps not knowing what to say, they say nothing. But when Jesus comes to wash Peter's feet, big-hearted Peter finds something to say...

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!" John 13:6-9

One scholar translates the strength of Peter's objection this way: **"You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never!"**

"You're my Teacher, my Lord, my God! I won't allow you to stoop so low as to wash my feet!" Peter had a grasp of who Jesus was and because of that, he was overwhelmed by the offer Jesus was making to him.

In that culture, the washing of feet was done because the roads were dusty and the footwear was open sandals – but either the guests washed their own feet or a slave would wash their feet. Amongst the Jews there was revulsion at this task; it was something that should be left to slaves, and preferably to Gentile slaves, not Jewish slaves. A host of repute would never stoop to such menial labour, and here Jesus, Peter's teacher and Lord was offering to wash his feet! It went against everything that Peter understood about authority and leadership.

But Jesus responds to Peter's objection by saying, "Unless you allow me to serve you, Peter, you can't be one of mine!"

When Peter realizes that to refuse this demonstration of Jesus' love is to cut himself off from Jesus, he jumps tracks – "Then wash me top to bottom, Jesus!"

God bless, Peter! I'm so glad this impetuous man is included in God's Word! We so often want to serve others in Jesus' name that we refuse to allow Jesus to serve us! We're so ready to be dispensers of grace to others, that we sometimes forget our need to receive it as well!

Before we can share God's love we must first receive it. As Warren Wiersbe wrote, "it takes humility and grace to serve others, but it also takes humility and grace to allow others to serve you." Sometimes the measure of our humility isn't found in our willingness to serve others, but in our willingness to allow others to serve us.

Jesus then moves the discussion beyond Peter ... suddenly we're aware of a broader audience and a deeper meaning. Jesus said to Peter...

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." John 13:10-11

Jesus used two words for cleansing here. One referred to a cleansing of the whole person, a bath, and the other to the cleansing of the feet, hands or head, a washing.

First, Jesus speaks about a "**bath**" that cleans the whole person and doesn't need to be repeated.

When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that we are made clean in God's sight by the washing of the blood of Christ. Paul wrote:

"do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? ... And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:9, 11

The "bath" that Jesus gives us is a once for all washing that frees us from sin's penalty. (cf. Rev. 1:5)

But then secondly, Jesus speaks about the need for those who have been "bathed" to "**wash**" their feet.

As we travel through life, we pick up spiritual "road dust" – sin and failure that hurts our fellowship with Jesus. We don't need a bath, just a wash! John was referring to that washing in his first letter when he wrote...

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

We can't "bath" ourselves spiritually and we can't "wash" ourselves spiritually – only Jesus can!

My nephew was a rather precocious two year old, but he came by his smarts honestly – both of his parents are doctors. His dad is a GP and his mother is a dermatologist. One day, he and his mother were out shopping. The young woman who served them in the store had a large mole on her face that caught my nephew's attention. Being proud of his mother's profession and also wanting to be somewhat helpful, he said to the young woman, 'You know, my mother is a doctor and she can help you with that!'

Jesus looks at our dirty feet and hands and says to you and me, "You know, I can help you with that! In fact, I really need to help you with that! Won't you let me?"

Sometimes we recoil from Jesus' offer to take away our sin & shame as I'm sure that clerk in the store did to my nephew's offer of assistance. Sometimes we respond: "No thanks, I'll handle it myself." Sometimes we respond: "No thanks, I don't want to bother you with it." Sometimes we respond: "No thanks, it's mine and I'm proud of it!" Sometimes we respond: "What are you talking about – I don't see any dirt!"

Jesus waits. Towel in hand. Offer still open. He waits.

There's an old hymn that we're going to sing as we worship Christ around the table of the Bread and the Cup that asks a crucial question:

**“Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”**

Have you had the “once for all” bath to cleanse you from your sin?
Do you need to allow Jesus wash away your sin and make your right with God?
“Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”

The hymn also asks another crucial question:

**“Are you walking daily by the Saviour's side? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Do you rest each moment in the Crucified? And be washed in the blood of the Lamb?”**

Do you need your hands, your feet, and your heart, washed of the “road dust” of sin?

Are there things you need to confess to Jesus and receive his cleansing so that your relationship with Him can be renewed?

As we come to this table of fellowship with Jesus, it’s time to talk with him about your need for washing and cleansing, whether its his “once for all” bath, or his ongoing washing from the grit of sin.

First of all, **Jesus asks us to allow him to do something for us that we can’t do for ourselves.** We can’t cleanse ourselves of sin; only he can.

But then, as an expression of our gratitude for what he has done for us, Jesus asks us to **do something for others that they can do for themselves.**

Jesus said to his disciples...

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?” John 13:12

Some people take Jesus example here in a direct manner. Many Mennonite groups and even some Baptists regularly have foot washing services as part of their Easter events or their communion services. Other churches do the same at various times. Personally, I don’t understand Jesus to be mandating foot washing as he does the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. It’s a practice this is never mentioned again in the Bible as something regularly done within the church. The early church never practiced it as they did baptism and the Lord’s Table, so I don’t see Jesus instituting a permanent ordinance of the church here. But if foot washing helps us to remember his main point, then I see nothing wrong with it.

What was Jesus’ main point? Do we understand what Jesus did for his disciples? Jesus was teaching an attitude and he wanted his lesson to be **remembered!**

Jesus said to his disciples...

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.” John 13:13-15

In other words, Jesus said, “If I’m your example and authority, and if I humble myself to serve you in the lowliest way, then you, too, should humble yourselves and serve each other.”

Jesus' asks us to express His love to others by serving them

In Jesus' day, the teachers of the Law, the religious leaders that the disciples would have known, loved to reinforce their social prominence by making sure they got the seats of honour at banquets. Jesus warned his disciples about their example...

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts...” Mark 12:38-39

They would never have thought about washing feet! They were too important! Jesus was warning us not to develop a false view of our own importance. He wants us to develop servant hearts.

Lyle Waggoner is an actor, famous for his roles on the old Carol Burnett Show and the Wonder Woman TV series. Several years ago he dropped out of acting to start his own business. He now owns a trailer company in Hollywood that provides luxury trailers for TV and movie stars while they are shooting on location. Each trailer is identical and there's a reason for that.

“This is an ego-based business,” Waggoner said. “This way, none of the actors can feel less important than anyone else. We learned that lesson early on. We once sent out what we thought were equal motorhomes for two lead actors and there was a complaint – one had hubcaps and one had painted wheels. The actress said she wanted hubcaps like her co-star or she wouldn't work. So we had to provide hubcaps.”

Jesus warns us against “ego-based” living with his beautiful example.

Years ago, Ruth and I were considering becoming missionaries with Africa Evangelical Fellowship, a mission that recently merged with SIM. Our goal was to teach overseas in a mission Bible school and so one day the Canadian candidate secretary, John Pomeroy, came to our home to have supper and talk about ministry.

I really don't remember what we talked about. But what I do remember is this. We had eaten. We had talked. And as soon as our meal was over, John said, “Let's do the dishes.” He got up and headed straight for the kitchen without listening to our objections that he let us do them. He washed our dishes!

It wasn't our feet – but it was what needed to be done.

It wasn't something we couldn't have done ourselves – but it was wonderful to have someone do it for us!

It wasn't what a “Fortune 500” executive might do – but it was what a servant of

Christ would do.

And it was remembered!

Whether it's
 doing someone's dishes,
 cutting someone's grass,
 shoveling someone's snow,
 doing someone's shopping,
 bringing someone to church,
 driving someone to the doctor,
 writing someone's Christmas cards,
 making someone's supper,
 taking someone for coffee,
 doing someone's taxes,
 washing someone's laundry
 It's all "washing one another's feet."

I was listening this week to a message by Elisabeth Elliot. For those of you who don't know her ministry, in the mid 1950s Elisabeth Elliot was a missionary in Ecuador with her husband Jim when he and four other missionaries were killed while sharing the Gospel with a remote tribe. Elisabeth Elliot then returned to share the Gospel with the very tribe that had killed her husband and saw many of them come to Christ. In later years she has had a wonderful ministry of Bible teaching and writing that has had a tremendous influence.

In her message on this passage, Elliot told a story that made a wonderful point about servanthood. During her college days at Wheaton College Elliot's life had been deeply affected by a woman who served as a "dorm mother" for Elliot and her fellow female students.

This woman had come from a wealthy family but when she had come to faith in Christ her family had disowned her, writing her out of the very large family legacy. On occasion, Elliot would talk with her, as a young woman might with her own mother, and this woman in turn would share with Elliot some of the ways in which God was working her life.

One evening she said, to Elliot: "Oh Betty, I came to Wheaton College to be a spiritual counselor but here I am carrying mops and toilet paper across the campus." As a "dorm mother" she cleaned and cared for her girls much as moms at home care for their families through countless repetitive tasks.

But this woman's willing, servant heart spoke to Elliot and made a tremendous impression upon her. This woman had come from a wealthy home with servants, but at Wheaton she willingly became a servant in order to love and care for her girls.

Years later, Elliot visited her in her retirement home and reminded her of that conversation. “Oh Betty,” she said, “did I really say that?” Elliot assured her she did and that it had made a tremendous impression upon her. **“Oh Betty,” the woman went on, “just think of the mercy of God that he allowed me to carry mops and toilet paper for his glory.”**

And Elliot asked:

“Are you willing to be a servant? Are you willing to be asked to do ridiculous things that nobody ought to ask you to do? Are we available? Are we humble enough to follow One who laid down everything to show us what it means to love God?”²

- **Invitation to The Lord’s Table**
- **Songs of Communion:**
 - Are You Washed in the Blood?
 - Behold the Lamb
- **Benediction**

² Blue Letter Bible, Elisabeth Elliot, “Servanthood”