

John 13:1-17, 34

Everyone--I mean everyone, from Einstein to Confucius to Rodney Dangerfield to the apostle John--has something to say about love. See if you can guess the source:

- "It is easy to hate and it is difficult to love. This is how the whole scheme of things works. All good things are difficult to achieve; and bad things are very easy to get."
- "Gravitation cannot be responsible for people falling in love."
- "I heard that love is a matter of chemistry. That must be why my wife treats me like toxic waste."
- "God is love."

But something we all understand, especially from hard, real-life experience, is that going from talk to action is a real challenge. So tonight, on Maundy Thursday, Holy Thursday, the night before Jesus died, you and I need to pay special attention, because our Scripture begins with these striking words: **"It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour 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."**

"God is love" and Jesus the true God "showed them the full extent of his love!" Wow, I'd better sit up and take notice! This is exactly what I need, and exactly what his disciples needed, because they were a hot mess on the night before Jesus died. The Renaissance artist Jacopo Bassano pictures the scene so well. [Last Supper pic here, and leave it up until "why can't I follow you right now?"] The disciples are arguing, falling asleep, and confused. The reason they were so unglued is that they still didn't understand or accept Jesus' mission as their Savior. They were completely unprepared for what would happen in the next 24 hours.

Here's a great example: Do you realize why Jesus spoke these words on Thursday evening, words we love so much? "My Father's house has many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you...I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14:2ff)." He was comforting his beloved disciples who just fell apart when he told them, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later (John 13:36)." They thought Jesus was deserting them, rather than going to the cross for them. In their confusion they peppered him with questions and objections: "Why can't I follow now? We don't know where you are going! Just show us the Father!"

Those feelings are familiar, yes? Have you struggled with an illness that won't go away, a disappointing job search, and said, "Lord, where are you taking me?" Have you ever hit a brick wall in a relationship, or in raising your children, and demanded, "Lord, just show me where you are in this! Prove it!" Do you ever struggle with a sin that gets the better of you again and again, and cry out to God, "Why can't I be a glorious, perfect Christian? Why can't I follow you right now?"

Jesus didn't argue with his friends and followers, he gave them exactly what they needed, proof of his perfect love for them. He demonstrated his love, God's love in three ways: He washed their feet. That doesn't sound like much, until you realize that it's Jesus, God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, who is on his knees before his messed-up disciples, performing the work of the lowest servant in the household! I always loved this painting of the scene, by 19th century British illustrator Ford Madox Brown. [Washing Peter's feet pic here, and leave it up until the end of the next quote.] Peter is holding his head trying to figure out what this could possibly mean. And the disciples at the table look totally perplexed.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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. What a testimony to our Savior's determination to serve and to save! He knew that all things were under his power, he knew that he had come from heaven on the greatest divine mission to live and die as the perfect substitute for the world of sinners, these sad

disciples in the upper room and right here in this room. The betrayal of his friends, the injustice he suffered at the hands of the Jewish and Roman leaders, this was no mistake! It was no tragedy! This was Jesus, the Son of God, loving, serving, and saving his beloved. And they were, we are, a mess!

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." The theme of our messages right now is "Jesus changes everything--what if we had all that we need?" Sadly, it often happens that I don't understand what I really need. Like Peter I don't want to admit what I really need. He and the other disciples didn't see what a mess they really were. So he objected: "Jesus, you don't need to wash me! Don't go to such an extreme for me! You're God himself! I don't need you to stoop this low for me!" It reminded me of those times when my children wanted to do things on their own, and I had to step in. It might be ok, even cute, when the 6 year old says, "I can tie my own shoes, pour my own milk, pick my own outfit." But when they say, "I can cut my own steak, ride my bike in the street like you do," then we step in out of love and concern for them. Jesus was all about proving his love, and he stepped in, leaving no doubts about our needs and that he wanted to wash them and die for them and us!

Then he demonstrated his love as prayed for them. Jesus poured out his heart of love to his heavenly Father for his disciples, in their hearing: **"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."** Have you ever poured out your heart to God in the presence of your loved ones--your spouse, your children, your friends? It is a powerful, raw testimony to your love for them and your trust in the Lord. Jesus did just that, and this is certainly a teaching moment for you and me. Just a few verses later Jesus said, **"As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34ff)."**

And he gave to them and to us his gospel of love in a form that we can touch and even taste, served to us in his meal, the Lord's Supper. **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-28)."** Someone wiser than I has pointed out that most world religions teach human beings how to reach up to god, or to climb up to a higher, spiritual plain. Christianity is just the opposite. God comes down to us. The Son of God kneels down to serve his disciples. And he goes to every possible length that you and I, human as we are, can understand and trust his beautiful gospel of salvation. His gospel of love and acceptance comes to us in words on paper or on your screen, in sound waves that we hear, in the water of baptism, and the bread and wine of Jesus' Supper.

Our Lord is so determined that you and I know his love that he kneels down before us in a humble bit of bread and a sip of wine which we eat and drink. It's another miracle of Jesus' love! **"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood**

of Christ! And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16)!" "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26)."

I hope it doesn't sound tacky to say that this is the trifecta of Jesus demonstrating his love for you and me! It was the day before he went to the cross for us! He saw honestly what a mess I am and you are, he knew our great need which we love to avoid and hate to admit, and with pure determination he knelt down and showed us the full extent of his love. Amen.