

John on Jesus - Scandalous Love

May 26, 2013

This morning, we begin John 13. Take your Bibles and turn there. In the pew Bible, it is page 900. Two weeks ago, when we finished John 12, we finished Jesus' public ministry. In John 13, Jesus is with his disciples. The doors are closed. The public ministry is over. Jesus is now focusing on his disciples. Through this Gospel, we are a fly on the wall listening in on Jesus' private teaching before he dies on the cross.

Let's put our finger in the text and begin our study.

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. John 13:1 (ESV)

This was just before the Feast of Passover. This puts us toward the end of Jesus' last week. The Triumphal Entry was on a Monday. At this point, we are talking Wednesday or Thursday. We are getting close to the end.

The text tells us, "Jesus knew his hour had come." Just so we are clear, Jesus knew exactly how everything in this final week would unfold. The kangaroo court that railroaded him to the cross was no surprise. The flogging that left him so disfigured that, according to the book of Isaiah, he didn't even look human was something he fully understood. The crucifixion — there was nothing surprising about it. He knew it was coming. The betrayal by Judas — that was not an unexpected twist. Nothing took Jesus by surprise. In spite of knowing what was coming, and the stress that was only hours away, rather than focusing on himself, he cared about his friends.

This really impressed me. I don't know about you, but when I get under stress, the last thing I think of is caring for others. Under stress, I go introvert. I wear ear plugs. Sometimes I wear ear plugs and shooting muffs over my ears because I need absolute quiet. I cannot stand noise. I turn off the lights in my office because I cannot stand visual stimulation. I lock the door and get focused. Not Jesus. He was not in a dark corner wearing ear plugs. He was loving his disciples to the end. I love that about Jesus.

Judas

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 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, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 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 13:2–5 (ESV)

We learn Judas was present at this meal. This is the Judas Iscariot that was about to betray Jesus. Nothing took Jesus by surprise. He knew Judas would betray him. Jesus knew Judas was in league with the devil and had already made the decision to shank Jesus when he wouldn't expect it. What did Jesus do? He had him over for dinner and fed him.

Think about this. If you knew you were about to be murdered and the guy who set the whole thing up was a good friend that you spent the last three years of life with you, wouldn't that freak you out? If he was part of your inner circle plus you were the perfect friend to him and you had done nothing but good toward him, would you have that snake in the grass over for dinner? Other texts

tell us Jesus even gave Judas the seat of honor next to him at the meal. Is that crazy or what?

I might have Judas over for dinner but it would be to bind him with zip ties and leave him wrapped in duct tape in the corner of my basement. None of us would have him over to treat him well, to love him, to give him the seat of honor and care for him if we knew he was a dirty snake in the grass plotting our murders. This is unheard of.

In addition, Jesus was not caught, like a white water kayaker, in the current of these events. He knew God the Father had given all power into his hand. In other words, Jesus has all authority. At any moment, Jesus could have changed his mind and walked away. At any moment, Jesus could have vaporized Judas with the divine version of a Star Trek phaser. Jesus had options on the table. He didn't use them. Rather than vaporizing Judas with a phaser from heaven, he loved him.

To add some color to this story, if this is the same meal talked about in Luke 22, we know a fight broke out. The disciples were still intoxicated by the euphoria of the Triumphal Entry. They started arguing over who was the greatest, which, if you are having a meal with Jesus, seems like a stupid argument.

Peter was claiming to have the biggest fan club. His wrist was cramped because he signed so many autographed pictures of himself with Jesus at the Triumphal Entry. His blog had 10,000 hits in one day. James claimed he was still

seeing stars from the flash bulbs bursting in front of his eyes because so many people wanted his photo.

I love the way Jesus handled this. He didn't yell at them and tell them to get their heads out of the clouds. He taught them by example.

...rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 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 13:4–5 (ESV)

Did you ever wonder why the disciples' feet weren't already washed? Usually the lowest slave in the house washed everyone's feet when they arrived. If this is the same meal talked about in Luke 22, this is a borrowed room. There was no host. The disciples were feeling pretty important from the Triumphal Entry. Nobody wanted to humble themselves and wash feet.

We learned about foot washing when we studied Mary washing Jesus' feet in John 12. In that day, roads were not paved. The roads were mud and they were used by camels, horses, and donkeys, just to name a few animals. None of those animals were potty trained. The key word is "bacteria." Everyone wore open-toed sandals. You could just feel the bacteria squirming between your toes.

I work out at the YMCA over lunch. I can tell you firsthand that even after a shower and Desenex, men's feet smell raunchy. Imagine how disgusting feet were in the ancient world when you walked on bacteria-laden roads with your open-toed sandals. Stinky feet were a serious issue.

In some locations, it was illegal to force your slave to clean your feet. Jewish rabbis went on record stating Jews were not to use their Jewish slaves to

clean feet. They could only use Gentile slaves, because foot washing was too disgusting of a task for the people of God.

What did Jesus do? He got up. He stripped down to what is the ancient version of his BVDs. We are talking embarrassing and humbling. He got two basins. This didn't look like Leonardo DaVinci's painting of the Last Supper

where they are sitting at a big picnic table. If they were sitting in the typical Jewish style, everybody was laying on their left sides on the floor with their heads toward the center. One by one,



Jesus picked up their feet and poured water over their feet into another bowl. He started scrubbing the crusty smelly stuff from between their toes.

This is mind-blowing. The one who created the universe left his throne in heaven and permanently fused himself with a human body. The one who was proclaimed king by popular demand only hours before then took the position of the lowest slave and washed the disgusting feet of his disciples who were too proud of their status in the Jesus club to serve one another. That is scandalous love. It is humility beyond imagination. This is God serving us. Simply scandalous. Scandalous love.

You need to understand the impact of this. In the historical record, we have occasional records of someone humbling themselves to wash the feet of a superior or someone of the same social status. As far as I am aware, there is no

historical record of a social leader humbling himself or herself to wash an inferior's feet, except for this scene in the Bible.

If you think foot washing is amazing, remember who is in the group.

Judas! Jesus washed Judas' feet! Can you even imagine this? Jesus knew Judas had already decided to murder him. Yet Jesus washed his feet anyway.

Jesus gave us a whole new understanding of what it means to love your enemies.

"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you..." "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:27–36 (ESV)

Why did Jesus love Judas like this even when he knew Judas would not change? Jesus loved Judas like this because that is the way God loves us. He does good not just to those who respond to his grace but he does good to those who don't.

Did you read in the news this week about the two Muslim extremists that walked up to a guy in London and hacked the guy to death with machetes? That is sick. That is a new level of depravity. If the man that was hacked to death was a Christian and his parents were Christians, how does Jesus call them to respond? Are they to throw a pipe bomb into a Mosque or run up and down the streets of London with a hood screaming, "Death to Islam!"? Jesus calls

Christians to love and serve their enemies, to wash their feet, even while they are plotting to kill you.

You say, “Pastor, what happens if they kill us?” We go to heaven. This text tells us we are richly rewarded by God for doing good to them. People say, “That isn’t normal.” That is right. It is love that doesn’t come from this world. It only comes from God. It is scandalous love.

Peter

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” 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.” John 13:6–8 (ESV)

Jesus was washing feet, and he came to Peter. I love Peter. He was so impulsive. He opened his mouth before he engaged his brain. I think all of us can relate. Thankfully Mr. Speak-without-thinking was used by God to vocalize what everybody else in the group was thinking but were too stunned to say.

“Lord, do you wash my feet?” In the Greek, these words are emphatic. “Jesus, what in the world are you doing scraping those crusty things from between my toes? You are the last person in the room that should scrape my feet clean.” I love it when Peter said, “You shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered him, “What I am doing now, you don’t understand, but afterward you will understand.” Let me pause to take a little rabbit trail on this verse. Jesus told Peter that he didn’t have the full picture. He didn’t understand what Jesus was doing then, but he would understand it later. Isn’t that the way the Christian life works? God allows things into our lives and we totally freak out.

“Jesus, what are you doing? I got a “C” on my final exam. That dropped by grade point average. Now I can’t get into the college I wanted.” “God, how can you allow me to lose my job? I need to put food on the table. I need a job and nobody is hiring. Why are you letting my life fall apart?” This kind of stuff happens all the time. Many times, down the road, we look back on life and get a better understanding of what God was doing. We realize God is a genius. We didn’t understand it then but God knew exactly what he was doing. When we didn’t get the grades we needed, it was his way of steering us to a different major. When we lost our jobs, it was his way of humbling us so we would seek him. While we wouldn’t want to go through the tough times again, we treasure what God did in those times.

This is what was happening to Peter. He could not get his mind wrapped around why Jesus was washing his feet. Later on, Peter realized Jesus gave him an example to follow. Jesus gave them a living picture of how his 12 disciples then, and all of us today, should live. We wash feet. Greatness in the kingdom of God is not found in who you can get to wash your feet but in washing the feet of others in need.

Why do you think Peter was so opposed to having his feet washed by Jesus? I think it was because Peter was an American male. He was proud and autonomous. He didn’t like being in a position where he needed somebody else to help him. Peter didn’t like receiving help. “Jesus, I can wash my own feet. I can deal with my own dirt. You don’t need to wash them for me.”

Jesus came back and said, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” Unless you humble yourself and admit you need Jesus to wash the dirt out of your life, you don’t have a relationship with him. Following Christ means we swallow our pride and let Jesus clean us up and wash the dirt away. We can’t cleanse ourselves.

Some people have foolishly said that Christianity is a very easy religion. You don’t have to do anything to be saved. That is what makes it the hardest religion of all. If I gave you a list of five things or eight things to do to get in great with God, you would go out and do them and feel very smug about yourself.

On the other hand, if I told you there is nothing you can do to save yourself. There is nothing you can do to wash crud out of your life and God has to do it all, what would you think? The only way for us to get cleaned up was for God to humble himself. He had to come out of heaven, take on a human body, live a sinless life, die an excruciating death on a cross that we deserve to die for our sins and conquer death. The only way to get rid of crud and participate in what God has done is to let God wash your stinking feet and receive it with thankfulness. That is hard to do. It is all mercy. It is all humility. There is no sense of personal victory and declaring our own greatness at all. It is declaring God’s greatness and our total inadequacy.

This was what Peter wrestled with. Many of us are just like Peter. Nobody is going to wash our feet because we have it all under control.

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.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 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.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.” John 13:8–11 (ESV)

Peter started speaking without thinking. “OK, Jesus, if there is no way I can have a share with you other than washing my feet, then go for it Jesus. Wash my feet, my head --- I will get the shampoo --- and my hands. Give me an extreme Hollywood makeover. I am all in.” Jesus needed to calm him down a bit. Jesus told him that he only needed his feet washed. “Don’t get carried away.”

I think in this section Jesus is giving us a metaphor for the Christian life. When we come to Christ, all our sins are washed away.

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 (ESV)

In our Christian walk, while we are cleansed from sin once and for all through Christ, our feet get dirty. While we are saved once-and-for-all by our faith in what Christ has done, when we sin, we still need to go back to Christ and confess that sin. We need to tell God we are sorry. We make plans to walk in a different direction and to guard ourselves from sin. We need to experience that restoration and cleansing that only God can give. So while we are saved once-and-for-all by faith in what Christ has done for us on the cross, on a daily basis, we need to confess our sins and come to him in humility asking for his cleansing. What we are talking about is not positional salvation but the daily experience of our walk with God.

We are a people of scandalous love.

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? You call me

Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 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. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. John 13:12–17 (ESV)

We live in a time when Christianity is thought to be an action of philosophical speculation. We think the Christian life is just a big thought experiment. In reality, it is intensely practical. It changes the way we treat people. It changes the way we spend our money. It changes the way we spend our time. Our faith should even bring us to love and serve our enemies. Jesus says, we will be blessed if we do these things.

This passage tells us to look for opportunities to serve and help others in need, and then meet their needs. Don't blow a trumpet about it, just serve them. In particular, look for opportunities to serve and help those who are your enemies, the Judases in your life.

For instance, if you have a friend whose car breaks down, you offer to give them a ride. You don't have to put on Christian music and blast it on the radio hoping you are forcing the Gospel in their ear canals. You don't make them hold your Bible when you drive them around. Just serve them. When they thank you, tell them we have a God that loves and serves us and because of it, we enjoy loving and serving others.

Another example is the dishes. I don't know how it works in your house, but in our house, the dirty dishes pile in the sink. It is an unspoken rule that mom is the last one in the kitchen. She empties the sink and puts everything in the dishwasher. This passage says, "Wash mom's feet." Serve your mom by

washing the dishes. I know I just scored big points with all the moms because a sink with no dishes is truly an act of scandalous love.

In school, this means when somebody misses class, you help them by grabbing the homework and getting it to them. You say, "I already do that." You do that for your friends. Do that for your enemies. How about the guy who treats you like dirt. How about the girl who stabs you in the back. Wash the feet of your Judas.

As a church, this is the way we are trying to reach our community with the Gospel. We are trying to serve, like Jesus. This is why we took a Sunday off last year and spent the morning cleaning up our community and planting trees. We were serving like Jesus. This is why we are collecting coins for Caden. It is an opportunity to serve people in need. It is an opportunity to wash feet, just like Jesus. This is why, when we are working with the Spencer School District to open our new campus in its auditorium, much of the technology we are bringing in will be something the school can use. The school was surprised when it heard our goal was to serve it, not use it.

On Oct. 2, 2006, Charles Roberts entered a one room Amish school house in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He shot 10 of the girls, ages 6-13, killing five. While his act of terrorism made the news, what kept it in the news was the way the Amish community responded. An Amish neighbor went and comforted Charles Roberts' widow and children just hours after the shooting and extended forgiveness. One Amish man held Charles Robert's sobbing father in his arms for more than an hour, comforting him. The Amish set up a charitable

fund to help Charles' widow and children since there was no longer a father in the home. About 30 members of the Amish community attended Charles' funeral. When asked why they forgave this murderer and his family, their answer came in one word... Jesus.¹

It is only when our community experiences acts of scandalous love from our lives that people can begin to taste the scandalous love of the cross. We wash feet, even the feet of our enemies.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your scandalous love to your disciples. Thank you for washing their feet. We want to confess that we are often content to understand grace in our head, but not do the hard work of showing it in our lives. We understand humility as a word, but we don't like to humble ourselves. We don't like to wash feet, especially the feet of our enemies. We ask you to forgive us for that.

I ask this won't be another sermon where we walk away and forget what your word taught us but burn it into our hearts. I ask your Holy Spirit to bring John 13 to our minds this week and use it to prompt us to serve others in little ways and big ways. Use your word to prompt us to serve our enemies.

It is through the scandalous love of our lives that people around us will begin to taste the scandalous love of the cross that everyone so desperately needs. Amen.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amish_school_shooting