

MONDAY, 3/25

Read John 13:1.

The high and holy festival of Passover was near. It was a time when Israel remembered when the angel of death passed over those whose homes were covered by the blood of a lamb. Little did they know that the Lamb of God was about to shed His blood so that death could no longer have its hold on those who are in Him. This was the hour Jesus was waiting for.

When you read through John's gospel, you will encounter Jesus refer to "the hour" a number of times. "The hour" is not the kind of hour that will show up on a clock. Rather than a specific time, it is a specific moment. "The hour" is about significance.

For Jesus, "the hour" was the point in time when the events that led to the cross were set in motion. It is Jesus' arrest that then leads to His trial, which culminates in His crucifixion. This is the hour Jesus keeps looking toward.

Sitting at the table with His disciples, Jesus was all too aware that the hour was upon Him. This would be the last time, before enduring the cross, that Jesus would sit at a table with His disciples.

What do you do when you realize you are sitting in such a moment? What do you do when you realize this is the last meal you will share with those you've shared life with? I think you capitalize on the final moment in order to share how much they mean to you.

With the hour closing in on Him, Jesus is filled with love for His disciples. John says it this way: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." It would be easy with such a dreaded series of events looming over you to either miss the opportunity or think only about yourself. Jesus doesn't do either. His heart beats to show His disciples the fullest extent of His love. This is Jesus. He is the One who, like with His disciples, loves us to the end.

In John 17, Jesus prays for His disciples. A few verses later, He also prays for us, His followers yet to come. It is a prayer that is filled with His protective love. It captures Jesus' longing to be united with us and for us to share in His glory. It is this desire that burns within Jesus' heart. It is one of the pressing reasons He went to the cross. He faced the hour that He might glorify His Father and restore us that we might be with Him.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You love us to the end. What a wonderful truth! Help that truth to settle into our souls so that we find assurance in Your love for us. By Your grace, You have made us Yours. Amen."

TUESDAY, 3/26

Read John 13:2-3.

With the shadow of the cross looming, Jesus seeks an opportunity to show the disciples the fullest extent of His love.

John makes an interesting statement in verse 3, when he says, "Jesus knew He had come from God and was returning to God." This is a statement about Jesus' identity. John is saying that Jesus knew exactly who He was. Better yet, He knew who He was and whose He was.

Understanding our identity is vital for our well-being. Throughout the Bible, we see God speaking

into a person's identity. Sometimes, as in the case of Jacob who becomes Israel, God gives him an entirely new identity. In the Bible, identity is something that comes from outside ourselves. It is determined by the One who created us. He is the One who shapes who and what we are. We rely upon the Lord to give us our truest identity. That is why God often has to remind people of who they are before He can ever address anything else.

This is radically different from what you will hear in today's culture at large. The resounding message from our culture is that we are the ones who shape our identity--that our identity can be in flux rather than a constant. The problem is that this understanding affords us very little stability, which is one of the greatest blessings understanding our identity can give us. There can be no forward progress in a person's life until they understand who and whose they are.

Understanding your identity is also important because it informs what we do. Let's put it this way: for God's children, it is appropriate that we obey God, who is our good and loving Father. Because of what He has done for us, we know that He is worthy of our trust and will lead us to the life that is truly life. Obedience is the right response to God's making us His own. Since Jesus knew His identity, He knew the appropriate thing to do in that particular moment.

Jesus knew His job on earth was to represent the Father. In everything Jesus did, He revealed the Father and His Kingdom. As a result of living into His identity, the Father entrusted His authority to Jesus. We see this in verse 3 when the Father gave "everything over into His hands." He was giving Jesus the right to act as His representative.

The Father also gave Jesus the power to act. Supplied with the Father's power, Jesus would have the ability to live into His identity, thus accomplishing the task He had been given. Here's the kicker--the same is true for you and me. We too are God's children. We are called to represent the Father to others as Jesus did for us. When we live into our identity as God's children, the Father gives us His authority and power to act on His behalf.

We see this over and over again throughout scripture. A childless family is called to give birth to God's promises for the world. A shepherd with a criminal background is challenged to rescue God's people from the hands of mighty Egypt. Twelve ordinary men are gathered and sent out to transform the world with the Good News. What each of these cases have in common is the heart of Father who calls and empowers His children to act on His behalf. I wonder what story God is writing through you.

Praying Together:

"Father, You are the One who thought us up long before we were born. You have a wonderful perspective of who we are. May we have ears to hear You speak into who and what we are. May we, by the power of Your grace, live into who we are called to be so that we might do what You call us to do. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 3/27

Read John 13:4-5.

Jesus knew His identity. Identity is determined by relationship. Jesus' relationship to the Father meant He was God's Son. Yesterday, we looked at how our identity reveals what we should do, or our actions. Since identity informs response, Jesus understood that "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many." Recognizing this reality, Jesus got up from the table to wash the feet of His disciples.

In doing so, Jesus adopts the stance of a menial slave. While disciples routinely practiced

service toward their teacher, the position of washing feet was so humiliating that it was considered too demanding and was left to non-Jewish slaves. That's right: the lowest slave in the house was the one who had to wash feet. In fact, disciples were even encouraged against such behavior. So when there wasn't a non-Jewish slave present to wash their feet before the meal, the task was left undone. The disciples were doing only what they had been taught, but Jesus wanted to teach them something new. So He got up from the table and began adjusting His clothing so He could perform the task of washing their feet.

You could only imagine how shocked they were to see their Master do such a thing. Try to imagine how they felt as they watched Jesus wash the feet of one disciple and then another. Imagine how it felt when the Master moved over to you, and what it felt like when He picked up your feet and began to scrub off the dirt and grime from the day.

It feels impossible to imagine Jesus doing such a thing for them, let alone us. I can only try to picture the sense of unworthiness that each disciple felt. I'm sure more than one of them thought they should be the one washing His feet, not the other way around.

John paints a mental image of Jesus here that is different from some of the other ways we have encountered Jesus throughout our sermon series. This act is intentional. When Jesus tied the towel around His waist, He looked different than before. He looked like a servant. Jesus did this because He wanted His disciples to identify Him as a servant.

This begs the question: if Jesus wants us to see Him as a servant, how then does Jesus want us to be seen? The obvious but challenging answer is as servants. Jesus identifies Himself as a servant so that those who come after Him might do the same. He does this so that we will grab our towels and stoop to the heights of His love.

While Jesus puts His love on display for His closest disciples, this call to serve others as an expression of Jesus' love extends to all. While the way we serve a fellow brother or sister in Christ might look different given the bond we share in Jesus, it is vital that believers love their fellow non-believers by serving them. It is by serving people in humility that they will encounter the love of Jesus in a tangible way.

So, I want you to ask yourself, when people look at you, do they see a servant? Whom is God calling you to serve today?

Praying Together:

"Jesus, as You stooped to wash the feet of Your disciples, so You are calling me to do the same. Show me whom I can serve today as an expression of Your love. Teach me what it looks like to humble myself as You did. May the love You have shown me be evident to others as I serve them. Amen."

THURSDAY, 3/28

Read John 13:6-9.

Here Peter expresses what the rest of the disciples, including us, were thinking, by declaring, "Not me, Lord!" I'm sure every disciple before Peter who had their feet washed by Jesus felt the same thing. We would too.

Peter isn't being unfaithful here. He is keenly aware of his unworthiness to receive such an act of love from Jesus. In fact, Peter is showing us here just how hard it is for us to receive love. While

we may not like the idea of washing feet, most of us would rather be on the other end of the towel from Peter, washing the feet of Jesus rather than being washed by Him.

We get where Peter is coming from because many of us struggle with receiving love. We would rather be the one loving someone than the one receiving the love. We could dive deeply into the psychology of that, but we'll settle for a few of the major reasons why that is. One reason it is harder for us to be loved is that it is humbling to be loved. Humility can feel strange sometimes. We often try to shake the awkwardness by immediately doing something in return for the other. This helps us deal with any feelings of vulnerability that come from being the recipient of service.

Another reason we struggle with receiving love is that it shifts the power balance. There is a quiet, sometimes hidden, pride that comes from being the giver. We likely don't even recognize it as such until the script is flipped and we become the recipient. This is when that pride gets exposed. That is what happens to Peter here.

Jesus exposes the problem with that. For us to belong to Him, we must humble ourselves and allow Him to pour out His love over us. If we won't allow ourselves to be loved by Him, then we can have no part of Him. Why, might you ask? Again, let's visit the reasons we feel awkward about receiving love. Either it is pride or an unwillingness to embrace a power imbalance that keeps us from receiving His love. If we want Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we must relinquish our pride and desire for power. That is why the Christian life begins with surrender. We acknowledge that we have nothing to give to deserve such love. We are in such a feeble position that we can only receive His grace.

That is the dynamic behind these verses. If we want life in Jesus, we must allow Him to love us. If we do not, we will strive against Him rather than abide in Him.

Jesus doesn't force His love upon us. He invites us to receive His love, but it is up to us whether we allow Him to wash our feet or not. So, how about you? Are you willing to let Jesus wash you?

Praying together:

"Lord, I know I am not worthy to receive Your love, but You offer it to me. I throw down my pride that keeps me from receiving love. I am in need of Your cleansing power. Wash me and make me clean. Amen."

FRIDAY, 3/29

Read John 13:10-11.

I used to work with a statistics professor who was a rule maker and a rule follower. He was reared to believe that you should lock the doors and check them twice. He was a great cook, one who did not believe in adding a smidge of this and a pinch of that. He followed the recipe exactly as written. He is never late. He drives the same car he bought in the 80s by never missing a scheduled tune up or oil change. He knows how to save money and spend it, as long as his expenses were scheduled ahead of time. There is no skimping on the larger purchases for him.

If I never said another word about him, you might think that he was exacting when it comes to faith. He attends church. Check. He volunteers at soup kitchens. Check. He is a mentor at the local high school. Check. Yet you could do all of those things and not live by faith. Being a stickler for detail can lead you away from your faith if you are not careful. There are some who say they are Christians who focus on accomplishing a checklist of activities that, once checked off, mean they have done what they need to do to be considered Christian.

If we looked a little closer, we can see that the professor is a Christian, one who practices his faith in the community, one who seeks opportunities to share his faith, and one who finds ways to ensure that people have food for the week and Jesus on Sunday at the local coffee shop. He leads a monthly construction team for Habitat for Humanity and coaches the church baseball team bimonthly. He was baptized as an adult and lives into his new life by serving others in his community. Jesus would define the professor as being "bathed," meaning he has made a new covenant with God and he lives into that covenant by serving others.

But what about "clean"? There are two types of "clean": spiritually based and hospitality based. The professor is spiritually based clean because he was baptized and is actively serving God and submitting to God's will over his own. For those living in Jesus' time, becoming hospitality based clean involved having one's feet washed upon entering a home as a sign of welcome and hospitality.

Jesus said that although everyone who was baptized should also be spiritually clean, not all of them are. There was a disciple standing among them that wished to do Jesus harm. Jesus knew the identity of the man who would soon betray Him.

Praying Together:

"Lord, guide our feet in the direction You want them to go. Turn our heads in that same direction so that all we do and say will be guided by You. Wash clean our hearts, Lord. Purify them for Your work to be done. In Your name, Jesus. Amen."

SATURDAY, 3/30

Read John 13:12-14.

Jesus spent time at each disciple's feet, washing away the dirt and dead skin resulted from walking along dirt roads. He tied around his waist what He would use to dry their feet, one foot, one toe at a time. Jesus took His time to ensure they recognized the importance in His actions; the Messiah, the One prophesied hundreds of years earlier, was humbling Himself before each disciple. Jesus' head was bowed lower than the disciples' heads. It did not matter what their profession was, whether they were married or single, whether they were rich or poor. The disciples were a diverse bunch, and most of them were uncomfortable with Jesus' show of compassionate service, His hospitable acceptance, and especially His submission to their needs over His own.

Afterward, things would be different. Expectations would be different. It was as if Jesus, by washing the disciples' feet, was quietly proclaiming to each man, *I am your teacher and Lord and I chose to serve you as a servant would. I am asking you to do as I have done, no matter who it is. Show others who I am by serving them as I have served you. Be My example in this world.*

*Defy the rules of the religious institutions. Preach the gospel by living it. Love the world as God so loved the world. Find a way to make a difference in people's lives and they will follow you.*

In what ways are we doing what Jesus challenged His disciples to do? How can we do it better?

Praying Together:

"Jesus, grant me Your vision so that the blind may see. Grant me Your words so that the deaf can hear again. Give me the strength to carry on Your work in the world. Continue to show me

how to be the change You want to see happen in the world; grant me the courage to bring others along with me for the journey. In Jesus' name, Amen."

SUNDAY, 3/31

Read John 13:15-17.

I can only imagine how the disciples must feel knowing the enormity of Jesus' expectations for them. Though many of the disciples might not understand what Jesus was asking at that time, surely there were a few that recognized the challenge for what it was. Stepping into the shoes of those who understood the assignment, it must have been overwhelming to try to remember everything that was said and done over the past three years. As a student, you witnessed it all, but without written notes to study, you cannot recall very much. Worse than that, you came into the classroom that day only to learn that it was test day!

You were also reminded that humility is important. It is only natural when you find yourself healing others or exorcising demons that you might want to take credit for such miracles. Knowing their culture and their need to show off their accomplishments, the disciples will need to be intentional about healing others in Jesus' name instead of their own. This will be a constant struggle to allow Jesus to take credit for all that they do.

Jesus says that there is no servant that is greater than his master and no messenger greater than the one who sent him. We must be intentional in making sure that all glory goes to God! And may we be blessed when we live into Jesus' example, just as it was written.

Praying Together:

"Lord, strengthen me to do as You would do. May we spend more time submitting our lives to You and less time putting our will before Yours. Embolden us to be Christ's representative in a culture that does not believe the Messiah exists. Show us the way to serve You best. In Jesus' name, Amen."