



John 13:1-17  
So That You May Believe: John  
“Do You Understand”

Rev. Brian North  
December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

Today, on this third Sunday in Advent, we continue our series in the gospel of John. And on this Sunday, as we heard a few minutes ago, we celebrate the love that God has for us. Now, about every two or three years, someone will ask me about the order of the Advent Sunday themes – hope, joy, love, and peace – and what is the correct order. I’ve had a couple of those conversations even this year. So I want to take a moment for a little advent theme educational moment before we get into the message.

So, here’s the deal: **There is no prescribed order for the Advent Sunday themes.** There are *traditions* that have arisen over the year, but that’s all they are: human-devised traditions – and there are a number of them. There is no Biblical, “Thou shalt celebrate Advent themes in this order.” I did an online search of “Advent theme order” and the first two results both listed them differently – one of which was an order I don’t recall ever seeing done. In fact, there’s no set rule on what the four themes are, let alone the order of them. In some Christian traditions they represent other things, like “faith, the Bible, John the Baptist,” or other Biblical people, and so forth. The colors of the candles vary – some are purple and pink like ours, others use blue instead of purple, some have all one color – like blue or red...sometimes green is incorporated. Some have the center Christ candle, and some don’t. I mean, it’s all over the map, and while we go with hope, joy, love, and peace each year: sometimes the themes are moved around a bit.

And today’s theme of love ties in perfectly well with the Scripture passage we are in. **If you want a real-world, repeatable, realistic example of how to love others, Jesus gives a great example in what we read today.** There are examples of loving others in Scripture that maybe inspire us more; Jesus’ death on the cross is the most obvious one. The woman who puts her last couple of coins in the offering plate because of her love for God is another. And examples like that inspire us for sure...but they’re not very practical for us as models: Most of us aren’t looking at crucifixion as a demonstration of love; most of us aren’t down to our last couple of dollars in our wallet or purse and thinking about putting it in the offering plate.

So those examples inspire, but they aren't very practical or realistic. But today is a practical, repeatable, realistic example of love. It's relatable. So, if you want a practical example of how to love others well – from your spouse or kids to your neighbor or co-worker – or even if you don't want a practical example (!), then today's passage and this message will be helpful. Well, the passage will be for sure, and hopefully the message, too. ☺ So, let's turn to **John 13:1-17**. We'll read through the whole passage in one fell swoop this morning. This is God's word to us this morning.

So, this is probably just a couple days prior to Jesus' death, during the Passover celebration. **Sermon Series Graphic**. It's the biggest festival of the Jewish faith. Jerusalem's population is swelled with people who have traveled from all over to be here. It is from this meal, oftentimes referred to as Jesus' Last Supper, that we get Communion, something we celebrate here at Rose Hill the first Sunday of each month. Communion is based on this Passover meal, particularly what happens a little later on in the evening, as told in the other gospels and also as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 where he relates this meal some as well.

And I'm really glad that we're going through this passage here in Advent. I didn't explicitly plan it that way. To be totally transparent, I laid out the gospel of John for this fall and in 2023 based on the Resurrection passage. I wanted us to land on John's telling of Jesus' resurrection, on Resurrection Sunday. So, once I marked that one, I just laid things out from there, working backwards toward the beginning of John's gospel, picking out sections of the gospel for each Sunday that function as a unit. I even had 6 weeks that needed filling in somewhere, which worked out perfectly to launch our new vision when we did that series 1 Peter and the Exiles book that went with it back in October and early November.

And so here we are in Advent, when we start preparing for the birth of Jesus, when he was "wrapped in swaddling cloths...and laid in a manger." That's the Biblical language we're familiar with to describe him when Jesus was born. And: **Here in today's passage, we see Jesus again wrapped, but not in a cloth for a baby, but a towel for an adult.** And where in Jesus' birth

people came to him and brought gifts, or simply came in awe of him because of the star overhead and the angelic announcement of his birth and so forth...and they offered their presence and/or presents...now Jesus has drawn his disciples around him and he's the one bringing something to them. It's not about what they have to offer him, as it was at his birth, it's about what he has to offer to them. And what he offers is love, modeled in a practical, everyday kind of way. He sets an example for them, as he says in verse 15, and later in verse 34 he calls it an example of love.

Now, Jesus doesn't wash the disciples' feet as an example because he's calling us to do that exact same thing necessarily. It was culturally relevant for them in a place that was dry and dusty (no paved roads/sidewalks, mostly just dirt), and in a day where everyone wore "Jesus sandals" long before Birkenstocks. There *may* be opportunities for us to wash people's feet. That might be how we end up showing God's love to someone. You might care for a child or an elderly parent where you wash their feet. You might find yourself on a mission trip washing peoples' feet. But we need not get too hung up on the foot washing itself. **The point Jesus is making is to love and serve our neighbor in practical, relevant ways.** He's giving us an example here of how we do that. It's an example that we can identify with and repeat over and over – much more so than his death on the cross, which is another act of love and service and is kind of a one-time thing. It's like if God has given you the spiritual gift of martyrdom, you only get to use it once. But washing someone's feet? Serving them? Loving them in practical, everyday, culturally relevant ways that meet needs? That's something we can embrace.

Now, this love is not restricted to certain people who meet certain criteria. For instance, Judas is there, and just a very short while later, will betray Jesus into the hands of the authorities. John tells us in verse 11 that Jesus knew this about Judas. **This is significant and illustrates for us the unconditional nature of Jesus' love.** Jesus doesn't only love those who perfectly love him back. Jesus doesn't love only those who have everything together. Jesus doesn't love only those whose hearts are right, who live with right motives, and have perfect integrity. Jesus' love is way more persistent than that – and that's not just good news, it's great news. Jesus was not deterred by Judas here, and He's not deterred by us, either. None of us have everything

together. None of us are perfectly faithful. I'm sure we have each betrayed Jesus at some point in our lives, perhaps multiple times. **The good news here is that Jesus doesn't stop loving us just because we are more like Judas than we want to admit.**

But even though Jesus washes Judas' feet, it unfortunately doesn't go any further than that. Judas' heart is still unclean. He is not a changed man. His heart is won by a love of money. 30 pieces of silver to turn Jesus in. Money is still something that captures a lot of people's hearts – even those who spend a lot of time with Jesus, like Judas did. So, Judas has been withholding this part of his life from Jesus' love all this time. Even here, at the Passover meal, he keeps it to himself, buried, hidden, unwilling to let it be exposed to the love of Jesus so he might be healed of it. In spite of that, and even though Jesus knew this about him, Jesus treated him no differently than any of the others: His love is persistent.

And then there is Peter: He's the disciple who should have carried a crowbar around with him everywhere he went so he could pry his foot out of his mouth. He had a way of just speaking without really thinking. And once again, we **Jesus is persistent in his love.** Jesus is not going to be stopped from serving in this way. Now, Peter initially puts up some resistance to Jesus' efforts to wash his feet. "You shall never wash my feet," he says in verse 8 when Jesus comes around to him. Jesus tells him the consequences of that, that Jesus will have no part with him.

But Peter's desire to be with Jesus, to have a part of what it is Jesus is all about, is too great. In the end, Peter wants not just his feet washed, but all of him. He wants to go all in, not just part way, even if he doesn't yet fully know what that means or what it entails. And yet, it would be just a few hours, or maybe a day, later that Peter would in fact deny even knowing Jesus, let alone having any part of him. Peter is Mr. Hot and Cold. No lukewarm with him (Revelation 3:16). He's hot one moment and cold the next: First, he doesn't want any foot washing, then he does – plus his head and his hands; and then a short while later he denies knowing Jesus at all! He's all over the map. And yet, Jesus loves him, just like the others.

And so you see, both Judas and Peter have sin in their lives – which, on one hand is obvious, I mean the other disciples did as well. We all do. But these two are highlighted for us. Judas keeps his hidden and unacknowledged and receives the foot-washing with the deceit and pride in His heart, while Peter recognizes his sin that he's unworthy of Jesus' act of love, and has to be persuaded that it's ok for Jesus to wash his feet, too.

And yet: **In these two guys, who are at once opposites and the same, we see the full range of people that Jesus loves, and how he goes about loving them.** Whether we're like Judas and hide our sin and pretend we have it all together only to betray him, or like Peter and we blurt out our unworthiness of Jesus' love and end up denying him...either way, Jesus is going to keep loving us, because it's not really about us. It's about Him, and His mission, and His calling, and His Love. And he loves us by giving of himself in acts of service – from his birth, throughout his life, to this foot washing, to the cross.

You know, many here this morning have heard before that Jesus loves us no matter what, and many probably understand that; or at least we *think* we understand it. Jesus even asks them that question in verse 11, “Do you understand what I've done for you?” There are others here who maybe have never been told that God loves them and that his love is most profoundly shown in Jesus. Some people believe that God is angry at them, or hates them, or wants nothing to do with them. Sometimes, unfortunately, they've even gotten that message from Christians. That is so opposite of who God is. **Jesus shows us who God is, and Jesus clearly loves people in spite of their (our) unlovable tendencies.**

Of course, there are also a number of people in today's world, perhaps some here this morning or watching online, who don't believe that God exists; that there's no God who brought the universe into existence and ordered it to be sustainable; that our world is purely accidental, and so are we; that there's no basis for morality or choosing right or wrong – that it's all determined by humans based on the whims of culture; that there is nothing beyond what the eye can see – including with James Webb Telescope and the Hubble Telescope...that there's no spiritual dimension; no God; no heaven or hell;

no eternity. Some people believe that, and quite frankly, I think that takes a lot of faith.

In fact: **It might take more faith to believe there's no God, than to believe God is real and he loves us and he wants us to be with him for eternity.** If what we believe matters, and impacts eternity, as Jesus says it does countless times, then the risk of believing there's no God, and particularly of not believing in Jesus, is high. We even get that right here in Jesus' comment to Peter in verse 8. If we reject Jesus' love, as Peter first wanted to do, then Jesus will have nothing to do with us, he says. We need Jesus to wash us clean. Our hearts need what only he offers. He's not going to force us to be washed by him or to be in his presence here and now—or in eternity. I mean, would that even be loving to force someone to do that? I don't think so. Even here, Peter has the freedom to walk away if he doesn't want to be washed.

And so, in that moment, Peter realizes that in that case, he wants as much of Jesus as he can get. So, he says, "Then not just my feet but my hands and head as well." If you don't know the love of Jesus in your life, if all of you – your head, your hands, and most importantly your heart and your soul, has not been washed clean by him, then he invites you to be washed clean by him today.

But here's what we all need to know and remember, whether we're new to the faith or been a Christian for decades: while it might take more faith to live without God in our lives, it's certainly an easier life. **The call to follow Jesus is not easy, because Jesus serves others, and he calls us to do the same thing.** He says so in verses 14 and 15 – wash one another's feet; I've set you this example. He explicitly tells them that he's done this not just for them, but so they would do something similar for each other, so that the world would know about Jesus. This is how we love other people – each other, and beyond the walls of the church because although Jesus focuses on the disciples here it's clear that his love is offered to all. And we love others by serving them, helping them, meeting tangible needs. And that's not easy. Loving others is hard. I heard a teacher once say, "Teaching would be great if it weren't for all the students." Love would be great if it weren't for the people. Loving people can be a challenge. And guess what, that includes you

and me, so let's not presume it's only other people who are hard to love. You think the person sitting next to you is hard to love? They're thinking the same thing about you.

This love Jesus calls us to can be lived out through acts of service like Jesus models, but also gifts, words of love, time spent with people, and so forth (the so-called five love languages). What's the need you see in the people around you? He's shown us how to be his hands and feet in the world so others would know him as lord and savior and know his love. And that's not easy. Jesus ultimately did it to the point that it cost him his life, not just getting his hands a little wet. That's how much he loves you, and I pray you have received that love into your heart and soul. And then let's love others in tangible, practical ways so that people would be pointed to Him...so people would know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, just as we do. Let's live with that kind of love. Let's pray...Amen.