

**“The Story of God’s Love for You and the World” based on John 13:1-17, 34-35 and Luke 22:21-53
Delivered by Drew Mangione on Maundy Thursday, April 17, 2025 at Shelby Presbyterian Church**

In Jesus’s culture, sharing a meal with another person was a mark of hospitality. In our culture, it still is, and in sharing a meal with another person, we share not only the food and the drink, but we forge a bond with that person. In some cultures, it is rude to refuse a guest who comes to you for a meal. In part, this is because you are refusing to befriend that person. This is at the heart of this story we read tonight, and we will enact this meal in our communion liturgy, just as we did with the foot washing moments ago by washing each other’s hands.

Hospitality is at the heart of what John portrays in Jesus washing his disciples’ feet. Jesus goes beyond basic hospitality, and he calls on his followers to serve one another. In the ancient world, they did not have sneakers and shoes like those we wear. No, most people went barefoot, or they wore some kind of sandals. The sandals offered soles on the bottom to protect their feet, but the sand and dirt of unpaved roads clung to their feet. Think about how sweaty your feet can get, and the dirt sticking to this sweat, and then caking on your feet.

For that reason, you washed your own feet, or had someone of a lower status wash them. Typically, this was the role of an enslaved person, who held the lowest status. This is why Peter is so upset about the idea of Jesus washing his feet. Peter is concerned with the hierarchy, since Jesus was their teacher, and they were the students – so, they should be washing Jesus’s feet. But instead, Jesus is picking off that caked on sweaty mud. He washes their feet with water and dries them with a towel.

If it sounds gross, well that’s because it is. If it didn’t sound gross to you, I didn’t explain it well. But trust me, this is definitely something we would likely consider beneath our dignity. Imagine yourself, if you have employees, washing their feet at their dirtiest. Imagine yourself, being asked in class at school to wash a classmate’s feet. Imagine yourself, washing the feet of a homeless person.

Hear Jesus’s words: *“Do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly you say, for I am. If that is so, then I have washed your feet as the Lord and the teacher. So, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you an example so that you should do just as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, not one person who is enslaved is greater than their master, nor is one sent greater than the one who sent them. Blessed are you if you know these things and if you do them.”*

Jesus – the Lord and the teacher – washes the feet of his disciples. It is not because he is lower than they are, but he says that he has done this, precisely because of who he is as the Lord and as the teacher. He leads by example, and Jesus shows them what God’s love really means. God’s love for us is so great, that God does the unthinkable. God – who is the highest of all, the greatest of all – leads by example by throwing aside any status he has and serves the ones he loves – even his enemies.

That’s right, it is important to remember that John presents Judas as in the room. Judas gets his feet washed as well, even though Judas has rejected Jesus’s love for him. We might think this is the moment Jesus should punch Judas out – as one meme sent to me said, “Judas should have had his chin rocked.” But instead, Jesus washes Judas’s feet because he loves him.

Beloved, the authorities did not need Judas to betray Jesus – they knew who he was. God did not need Judas to betray Jesus in order for Jesus to go to the cross either. Judas is not some necessary evil – We know evil can always find a way. No, Judas represents for us our inclination to take things in our own hands, even if it means betraying what we claim we stand for.

God the Father sent the Eternal Son because of their love for the world, so that whoever might believe in him will not die, but will instead have eternal life. In the Son, we see the Father, because the Father and the Son are one. Jesus loves Judas, just as God the Father loves the world that rejects God, and puts its faith in human action and human solutions. The world could not handle Jesus pushing back death and sin, and so, with or without Judas, Jesus was going to die. The powers of Rome and the Judean leaders were going to protect their power, which came from causing fear, through sin and death.

If we say that we love Jesus, will we lay aside our comfort, our power, or our popularity, and do what is right to push back sin and death, regardless of what it costs us? Jesus says, ‘I have given you an example so that you should do just as I did to you.’ In order to judge the world and reconcile the world to God, God sent the Son to share in our humanity and live within our limits, and when the world rejected holiness and life. The world used the powers of sin and death to silence God, nailing Jesus to that cross, putting him in a grave. But as we will celebrate on Sunday, death could not hold our King. He died for us and rose for us, out of love for us.

In the gospel accounts, after this betrayal by Judas, Simon Peter will also betray Jesus. But Simon Peter does not reject Jesus’s love – he counts himself as unworthy of it – But he holds out hope, remaining with the others, even after Jesus has died. Judas leaves, and Judas never comes back – believing himself unlovable. Judas leaves before Jesus gives the command – *“Just as I have loved you, so also you should love one another. All will know that you are my disciples by this, if you have love among one another.”*

Beloved, we may well have many in our lives who should “have their chins rocked.” We may want to knock the lights out of our enemies – personal and political. We may deem this to be so necessary, that even though we believe in Jesus, we end up acting on this worldly impulse to take matters in our own hands. But if we do, if we betray Jesus, who called us to love, then we must admit our wrong and remember God’s love. We must not be like Judas and walk away from our faith. Nor can we make excuses to justify ourselves, changing God into a tyrant who needs our violence, be it in word or in speech. That is not Christian faith.

No, Christian faith calls us to see the incarnate God, the Word of God in our flesh, and recognize that in dying for us, rising for us, and ascending for us, we have been given the right to become children of God by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the downpayment on our inheritance of God’s abundant eternal life. Fear is the domain of sin and death – the root of their power over us. Complete love casts out all fear. It defeats sin and death. Because Jesus died for our sins, reconciling us with God, so, then we must recognize his example and follow.

It is not easy to do this – every single day is a battle, and we must admit we are all sinners. But every time we lay down our right to be above another person, we look like God. If we lay down our justification for why we have the right to mistreat someone, no matter how much we might fear

them, we reveal God's love in us. When we serve others, laying aside our status to help other, we reveal God's love in us.

Every moment when fear of the other and what they might do arises, we can lean on our faith in Jesus who already defeated evil and put that towel around are waist to serve. Like Peter, when we betray our faith in Jesus, we can turn back to Jesus's loving embrace. We can always do as Peter did and agree to Jesus's request to feed the sheep – to help others, laying down our own desires.

“Just as I have loved you,” – enduring betrayal, rejection, and even death for you, Jesus said, “so also you should love one another. All will know that you are my disciples by this, if you have love among one another.” Amen.