

**Love One Another — Rev. Denise Stone**

**Text: John 13:1–17, 34–35**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 03-28-2021**

Today is Palm Sunday. On a typical Palm Sunday, you might have come into church today and been handed a palm branch to wave as we sang about Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. In some churches, children would also be parading through the sanctuary waving their palm branches while we sang. Today is not a typical Palm Sunday. Nothing for the last year has been "typical."

This year, the text of today's scripture asks us to move forward a few days from Palm Sunday. Let's sit with Jesus and his disciples as they had their last meal together before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

John, Chapter 13, verses 1–17 and 34–35 tell us,

<sup>1</sup> Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. <sup>2</sup> The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with

the towel that was tied around him. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

<sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>i</sup>

## The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

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Included in today's passage is the scene where Jesus washes his disciples' feet. This is an unusual event in the life of the disciples – one they do not understand until much later. It might even be one that we do not fully understand all these years later.

It was customary in Jesus' day for a water basin and a towel to be provided for guests to wash their own feet when they came to someone's home. Notice that although this was a society in which many people had servants doing much of the household work, it was customary for *you* to wash your *own* feet, not a servant. In fact, "According to the Mechilta, one of the oldest works of midrashic [Old Testament] commentary, not even a Hebrew slave was expected to perform such menial service."<sup>ii</sup>

Yet, we find Jesus here taking on the role of a servant. "Jesus rises from the meal, lifts off his outer garments, and wraps a towel around his waist. Then he proceeds on all fours around the table, washing his disciples' dirt-encrusted feet."<sup>iii</sup>

This scene makes me uncomfortable. I fear I am much too like Peter and cannot fathom accepting such a selfless act of service – even from Jesus, himself.

Jesus' meal with his disciples and Jesus washing their feet was a very private, intimate event.

The disciples do not know what to make of all of this. After washing their feet, Jesus asks them “Do you know what I have done to you?” They don’t give an answer and Jesus continues speaking, “You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

They do not understand. They do not see with the eyes of Jesus this night.

Jesus KNOWS this is his last meal with them. The disciples do not.

Jesus KNOWS who is going to betray him. Jesus KNOWS who is going to deny him. Jesus KNOWS who is going to abandon him in his last hour.

Jesus KNOWS.

Still – even knowing all that he knows, Jesus LOVES – Jesus SERVES.

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Can you even begin to fathom the emotions that Jesus felt on this evening?

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This is Jesus’ “good-bye” to his disciples.

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Jesus’ last act of service for his disciples is washing their feet. Jesus’ last moment of teaching is washing their feet.

Jesus tells the disciples in verses 15 to 17:

For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Jesus then, in verses 34 and 35, tells the disciples,

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Love one another.

That is what it all comes down to – love.

Jesus’ commandment to his disciples is that they are to love one another.

We, who claim to be followers of Christ, to be Jesus’ disciples today, still have this same commandment – we are to love one another.

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“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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We are to love one another. We are to serve one another.  
We are to put others before ourselves.

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Does anyone outside of Christianity look at us and know we are Christians because of our love for one another??

Maybe that is why this passage makes me uncomfortable. I like to think that I put others before myself, but do I always?

I like to think that I'm willing to serve any and everyone in the name of Jesus Christ, but am I always?

I say that it is my goal to extend love and compassion to everyone, but is it always?

Do people look at me and know I am a Christian by my love for others?

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These are hard questions I found myself asking as I read this passage again – and maybe for the first time.

Perhaps you have similar questions.

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Mary Louise Bringle, in her article on this passage, suggests three lessons that we can take away from this text. 1) We need to learn to Receive; 2) We need to learn to Serve and 3) We need to learn to Reconcile.<sup>iv</sup>

First, we need to learn to receive service and ministry from others. We cannot do it all. I cannot do it all. We need to be

willing to accept what others willingly offer. I need to be willing to accept what others willingly offer.

Peter was embarrassed to have Jesus serve him in such a menial way as washing his feet. What are the things we are too embarrassed, or too proud, to receive? What blessings are we missing because of our unwillingness to receive from the service of others?

Second, we need to learn to serve. Many, if not most of us, do serve other people in different ways. But think about our acts of service? Do we enter the experience of others in our efforts of service? Jesus was in an intimate space with his disciples when he washed their feet. He knew them. He served them anyway. Do you find it easier to serve strangers at a soup kitchen or to offer acts of service your family or friends? What do we still need to learn about service?

And finally, we also need to learn to reconcile.

This one is perhaps the most difficult lesson for us to learn. If it has not always been the most difficult lesson for followers of Jesus, it might be the most difficult lesson for followers of Jesus today.

Reconciliation. The “restoration of friendly relations.”<sup>v</sup>

This applies to both our relationships with each other as well as our relationship with God. To be reconciled with someone may mean we need to acknowledge our own shortcomings and errors. We may need to apologize or to take the steps necessary to make amends.

To be reconciled with God means that we acknowledge our own shortcomings – our sins. We apologize, we repent and most importantly we work towards becoming the person God intends for us to be. It is in making amends with others that we move toward becoming that godly person.

We do this because God loves us. We do this because we, as disciples of Christ, desire to please and obey God.

Again, that is what it all comes down to – love. God’s love for us. Our love for God. Our love for each other.

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Jesus’ commandment to his disciples is that they are to love one another.

**We are to love one another.**

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“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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We are to love one another. We are to serve one another. We are to put others before ourselves.

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Please pray with me.

Merciful Savior,

We have traveled this long, dusty Lenten journey [to this beginning of Holy Week].



Our feet are tired, dirty, aching, and calloused.  
You have shown us Your love  
by becoming a humble servant.  
Humble us when we try to travel without You.  
As Christ has washed us,  
so let us wash one another.  
Humble us when we believe some work is below us.  
As Christ has washed us,  
so let us wash one another.  
Humble us when we are too proud  
to accept help, or care, or love.  
As Christ has washed us,  
so let us wash one another.  
Humble us when we do not fully receive  
the gift of Your amazing and bountiful grace.  
As Christ has washed us,  
so let us wash one another. Amen.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>ii</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown; Long, Kimberly Bracken. Feasting on the Word Lenten Companion (p. 145). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown; Long, Kimberly Bracken. Feasting on the Word Lenten Companion (p. 145). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iv</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown; Long, Kimberly Bracken. Feasting on the Word Lenten Companion (p. 146). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/reconciliation>.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2016/03/maundy-thursday-as-christ-has-washed-us.html>. Written by Karen Turner, and posted on the Lifeway website. [http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwcf\\_PDF\\_LW\\_MaundyThursday.pdf](http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwcf_PDF_LW_MaundyThursday.pdf).