

“With Jesus in the Upper Room - Lesson #1: The Service of Love”

Scripture: John 13:1-11

Graphics: last supper table, Jesus, chalice, towel, basin

Big Truth: The last moments of Jesus’ earthly relationship with the disciples were in the Upper Room around a table, eating a meal together. Those last moments were Jesus’ opportunity to give the most important lessons he wanted them to know and follow. The people of the Panama UMC are called to sit with Jesus and learn the lessons he taught in order to be the disciples Jesus wants us to be.

Focus Phrase: Jesus loves me and showed me how much by serving me in love.

1. Introduction

- A. (dramatically, walking to the table) Imagine with me that you and I had one evening with Jesus - an entire evening. Imagine that the evening included a special meal, and good conversation, and time together with your best friends.
- B. I imagine there would be eating and drinking and laughter and joking and all the things that we do when we get together with good friends and people we love (remember those days? They’re coming again soon, so be ready!)
- C. But what if...what if...Jesus knew something we didn’t know. What if Jesus knew that it would be his last meal - his Last Supper - with the group of men and women who he’d gathered around him to be his disciples - his student learners?
- D. Jesus knows that this is the last intimate time He is going to spend with you. He knows He’s going to die.
 - i. What does He need to say?
 - ii. What lessons does He need to underscore with you?
 - iii. How does He need to relate?
 - iv. What actions does He need to take to make clear who He is and what He has tried to communicate?
- E. You don’t know what Jesus knows - that He is going to die - but if you DID, would you listen?
- F. That’s the question for us as we spend time With Jesus in the Upper Room during this season.
- G. During Lent, which is our spiritual journey to Easter - and the empty tomb that’s the central promise of everlasting life - we’ll spend time in this Upper Room...with Jesus...as he teaches us the final - and most important - lessons of his life, and ours.
- H. Back in 2018, Stacy and I were in the “Upper Room” in Jerusalem. Now, it’s probably NOT the actual Upper Room in which Jesus was with his disciples.

That room was probably destroyed and rebuilt sometime in the first few centuries. And, actually, the “Upper Room” was not one of my favorite places in Jerusalem.

- I. But as we were standing in that room, listening to the tour guide talk about what happened in the Upper Room, I closed my eyes and tried to picture the disciples, and Jesus, and the meal set on the table, the basin of water in the corner, with a towel ready to wash feet. I tried to smell the torches and candles, see the red of the wine and the crust of the bread.
- J. And I realized that it didn’t matter to me if I was standing in the actual Upper Room or not. What mattered is that I listen to Jesus’ words...listen to his inflection...to watch his actions...to learn the lessons he was teaching to the disciples in that Upper Room on THAT day.
- K. See, Jesus’ final lessons are His most important ones. And even though - BECAUSE - he knew he was going to die that week, he was laser-focused on teaching them, and us, exactly what we needed to know after he was gone.
- L. So, let’s pray...and we’ll begin climbing the steps to the Upper Room, peering in the windows and doors, sitting at Jesus’ table...and learning Lesson #1 - The Service of Love, which is where Jesus started that evening.

M. PRAY!

- N. In your Bibles, John is the last of the four gospels, which are the first four books of the NT. The gospels are the eye-witness accounts of the life of Jesus. John wrote this gospel after having spent time with Jesus...in his inner circle.
- O. Turn to John chapter 13, starting in verse 1.

2. Scripture

A. READ John 13:1-11

- B. We tend to read that passage and think, “That happened in some other place with people we don’t know, in a time so far removed from ours.” And, even though all those things are accurate, let’s remember that we’re at this meal on this evening with Jesus.
- C. We aren’t one of the disciples, per se. We’re guests that’ve been invited...and we’re just off camera but still very much in the room.
- D. The setting is right before Passover. Passover was and is the Jewish celebration of the Israelite’s release from captivity from slavery in Egypt... thousands of years prior to that night. This celebration is THE most important week in the life of the Jewish people.
- E. And, it’s something we, as Jewish disciples sitting with Jesus in the first century, do every year. We eat this meal just prior to the holy days ahead.

- F. Jesus chose THIS day and THIS meal - in this Upper Room - to teach us his most important lessons.
- G. That lesson begins, ends, and is shown in and by LOVE.
- i. John wrote, in verse 1, that Jesus KNEW his hour had come, which means that Jesus KNEW that his time on earth was coming to an end...to leave THIS world and return to the Father.
 - ii. So, having loved his own who were in the world - who are the disciples that were sharing this evening with him (us included, right?) - having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end.
 - a. Some translations say, “he loved them to the uttermost” - meaning he loved them “completely” or “to the full extent”. John most likely intended for us to read both translations into his words here.
 - b. Jesus’ love for the disciples was certainly to the end of his time on earth. Jesus’ love was also, though, to the full extent of his unlimited capacity. Jesus’ love is even to the end of the age...and the age to come.
 - iii. But saying he loved them and showing it are two sides of the same coin.
- H. So, we read in verse 2 that while the meal was happening (can’t you just hear the constant din of chatter and eating and laughing around you in the room...?), there were things that Jesus knew that we don’t.
- I. Jesus knew this was his last meal with them. Jesus knew that the devil had prompted Judas to betray him (read that in John 13:18-30). Jesus knew what he needed to do. Jesus knew that the Father had given him every authority and power. Jesus knew that he was soon to return to the Father in heaven and reign as King over the universe.
- J. We aren’t thinking about that stuff...we are thinking about the meal and the celebration. Yet, it makes EVERY DIFFERENCE that Jesus was!
- K. SO...SO (in verse 4), Jesus did the one thing that would completely shut down the chatter...cause every one of us to stop eating and drinking...and cause an incredible silence to falls over the room and everyone gathered here.
- i. Jesus got up from the table (he would’ve been inclined on the floor like all of us).
 - ii. Jesus took off his outer cloak, so that he would be unhindered. Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist.
 - iii. Jesus went to that basin by the door.
 - iv. Jesus poured water into the basin.
 - v. And...Jesus began to wash our feet. (pause)

- L. Imagine that you're there...watching Jesus get up and begin to wash the feet of the people in the room. One-by-one. Jesus - the Rabbi who isn't JUST a Rabbi (we learned last week) - got on his knees (got low) and washed feet - dirty, smelly, misshapen feet. And for each set of feet, Jesus washed and dried with the towel he had wrapped around his waist.
- M. **THIS** was not done out of some duty as a servant being told to do it. **THIS was done out of love for us.** THIS was done because Jesus wanted us all to know that he loves us and the most important way to show it was to get on his knees and wash our feet.
- N. How intimate. How intentional. How humbling. This is so Jesus.
- O. Well...it wasn't long before Jesus got to Peter and Peter rejects this act of love from Jesus. "No way, Jesus!" (Oh, Peter...)
- P. Jesus then simply reminded Peter that unless he participated in this relationship - unless Jesus washed his feet (not his whole body, just his feet), he would have no part of him. The Greek phrase there is *meros*, which means fellowship... which is unity and intimacy that comes through the service of love.
- Q. Scholars have likened Peter's request to wash his whole body to baptism...and the washing of feet to be the regular acts of repentance for the sins we commit.
- R. Jesus told us that evening, "You are clean because of your baptism and faith...repent and keep believing in me."
- S. The narrative ends with Jesus calling out Judas' betrayal. Jesus knew THAT too...and laid that on the table.
- T. Yet, think about this: even Judas had his feet washed by Jesus because LOVE is bigger than our sin...love is bigger than our mistakes...love is bigger than our betrayals of Jesus and his love for us.

3. Application

- A. Now, it's usually at this point in the sermon that I give us three application points, wrap it up and we sing and go home.
- B. But, today is a little different.
- C. If you and I are in the room with Jesus while he's washing our feet, is there really anything we need to DO besides sit and receive?
- D. We could be, I suppose, like Peter who rejected Jesus' humble offer to love him through service, but honestly, that didn't really end up so well for Peter, so maybe we should avoid that. OK?
- E. We DO know that love is not just a feeling, but it's what you do. And next week, we'll go to the second part of this story when Jesus says, "Just as I have done, you should do." We're all fairly high-capacity people who work, and

serve, and play, and teach, and live...we're growing and finding ways to be better disciples.

- F. But for today, Jesus wants you to simply sit and reflect on what it looks like and feels like to have Him washing your feet. Right now, I want us to stop and BE...stop and receive this gift: Jesus loves you. Jesus loves YOU. And the love of Jesus is the best thing you could ever receive.
- G. The love of Jesus is sacrificial. The love of Jesus is honest. The love of Jesus is filled with hope and a future. The love of Jesus heals our wounded souls and hurts. The love of Jesus is redeeming. The love of Jesus is yours to receive.
- H. So often, though, you and I don't stop long enough to feel loved. And, before I lose us in the 'feelings', Jesus knows that love is not just a feeling. Jesus knows that in order to BE loved, we have to be shown love in tangible ways.
- I. The cross was certainly a place where Jesus showed his sacrificial love.
- J. But, He's isn't there yet on this night...he's still WITH US in this Upper Room. So, he does the one thing that he knows will prove his love and allow you to FEEL loved. He kneels and washes your feet.
- K. And, in this moment, you may be thinking, like Peter, "Please don't wash my feet, Jesus. I'm not all the world thinks I am."
- L. If that's true, think about this. Jesus knew the disciples would reject him. He knew they would betray him. He knew they would be afraid and deny him. Yet, he washed their feet anyway before it all happened.
- M. He kneels and washes YOUR feet despite your failures...all your sin and all the ways you and I tend to forget that he loves you.
- N. And, while Jesus is washing your feet, while Jesus is serving you, it's not the time to jump up and help him. I just KNOW some of you would have a hard time not holding the towel or making sure Jesus had enough water. Seriously, Jesus doesn't need you help right now. While Jesus is serving you, it's your time to be served by Jesus. Let him! ...just be loved by Jesus.
- O. So, maybe there IS some practical application today, after all. But it has nothing to do with doing...and everything to do with being...with identity.
- P. In order to receive the service of Jesus' love:
 - i. **Know where you came from.**
 - a. And I don't mean your home town. Reflect on your journey that has brought you to today...to this moment...having your feet washed by Jesus.
 - b. The disciples came from all over the place, but they were all in the same room with Jesus. They may never have thought it would be like this, but they wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

- c. Be thankful for your faith, even as small as a mustard seed.
- d. Be thankful for your church and your leaders.
- e. Be thankful that your journey brought you to this place today, either here in person or online.
- f. Where you came from gives you identity because it's your story.

Q. And, in this moment, **Know whose you are.**

- i. It's not the president that kneels before you. It's not a maid or butler. It's not your parents or spouse or your children.
- ii. It's Jesus kneeling before you. It's Jesus washing your feet.
- iii. You are HIS. He is serving you...loving you.
- iv. And everything he's done is because the price he willingly paid bought your salvation.
- v. He's kneeling at your feet to wash them because he made your feet, as beautiful or ugly as they are. You are His. That's WHOSE you are.

R. Which leads us to the final reflection as Jesus is washing your feet - **Know who you are.**

- i. You are loved by Jesus in a foot-washed, served-and-cleansed sort of way.
- ii. "I am a child of the King." Say that with me, "I am a child of the King."
- iii. And he doesn't expect anything from you in this moment except for your willingness to be loved. That's WHO you are.

4. Conclusion

- A. In some ways, the application for today is harder than if I gave us several things to DO as a homework assignment.
- B. But, for this first full week of Lent: Sit and just be served by Jesus. Be loved by Jesus.
- C. The Service of Love for Jesus is for us to know the intimacy of Jesus through simply BEING loved. Jesus wants to do that...so we need to let him.
- D. Give yourself some space - when you're riding in the car or before you put your head on the pillow or putting the kids to bed, when you pray in the stillness of the morning - to just **be still and feel the love of Jesus**. Truly FEEL his love for you.
- E. Next week, Jesus will challenge us to wash the feet of others...but for this week. Just be loved.
- F. Let's pray...
- G. **Pray!**