

As I begin this morning, let me encourage you to turn with me in your Bible to John 13.

“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” 8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” 9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” 10 Jesus answered, ‘Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.’ 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's

feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

Last September we began a journey through the Gospel of John. With the season of Easter upon us, we return to John's Gospel, focussing on the events leading to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At times, when the subject matter is incredibly small, a photographer chooses to narrow her field of focus so that even the most minute detail is revealed. This is what John is doing in his Gospel; nearly half of it is focussed on the last week in Jesus' life. John slows things down, narrowing his field of focus; he doesn't want us to miss the details, and what they reveal about Jesus.

In this magnificent chapter, three primary people are on display—Jesus, Judas, and Peter. And based on chapter 13, if I were to sum up these characters with a single word, it would be in the following way: Jesus—love; Judas—betrayal; Peter—denial. This morning I'm going to walk through the three movements of chapter 13, beginning with verses I've just read.

Vs. 1-17: The chapter begins in an interesting way, with a series of statements concerning *what* Jesus knew. Jesus **knew** that His hour had come; Jesus **knew** that He had come from God, and was returning to God; Jesus **knew** that Judas would betray Him; Jesus **knew** that the Father had put all things under His power.

We're all going to die someday, but it's God's mercy that we spend the vast majority of our lives unaware of the when and how. Jesus

knew the when and how; we don't know when this became clear to Him, but here, at the Last Supper, Jesus knew. This knowledge brought focus, intention, to what Jesus did and said.

I want to pause for a moment to address one of the statements John makes concerning Jesus. John writes, "*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power*". It's a curious phrase, wouldn't you agree? It's particularly curious, given what's about to happen to Jesus. In a matter of hours, Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, convicted, beaten, and crucified. And yet John writes, "*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power*".

Jesus was powerful. If you believe the eye-witness accounts, there can be no doubt concerning His power: He transformed water into wine, the wind and the waves obeyed Jesus, He opened eyes that were blind, He even raised a dead person to life.

And that's how we tend to think about the powerful; they use power to affect change around them. The really powerful have so much power that they exert their will upon others, while they themselves remain "untouchable". In Jesus we find a mystery. He is Almighty God in human form. At one and the same time He is above us, beyond us, and, the One who draws near—He can be known and touched, even harmed.

The phrase that John uses expresses the divine sovereignty of God; all that was about to happen to Jesus was in keeping with the purpose of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the infinite wisdom and love of God, God the Son became human, submitting to those who plotted

His death, but all the while, God was at work to redeem the world.

The religious leaders conspired against Jesus, and Judas betrayed Him, but it only *appeared* as though Jesus was a pawn in their game. To borrow an analogy, God is like a Grand Master of Chess, except that He can see much more than 15 moves in advance; no one can out-manuever God.

And so, the death of Jesus—while horrible—can never be described as tragic or avoidable. If "all things" were under Jesus' power, that means both everything and everyone. "All things" includes Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, and the agony of the cross. From heaven's perspective, the cross wasn't something that happened to Jesus, it was something that Jesus chose.¹ Let's move on to talk about the foot-washing.

When we place John's account alongside the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they complement and inform one another. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke's account, Jesus redefines the Passover Meal in light of His coming death. Jesus broke bread, saying, "*This is my body, given for you; do this is remembrance of me.*" In the same way, after supper, He took a cup saying, "*This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*" It's interesting to note that John doesn't mention these words or action.

Luke's account includes an argument that broke out during the meal; the disciples began to argue among themselves who was the greatest. After it had gone on for awhile, Jesus shut things down, saying, "*In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people...²⁶ But*

¹ John 10:17-18; Hebrews 12:2.

*among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. 27 Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves.”*²

Luke's Gospel is the only one that mentions this conversation; John doesn't include it. But John does include something the other accounts do not—a symbolic action, performed by Jesus—a foot-washing.

Can you imagine the scene? Around the table Jesus and the disciples enjoy good food and conversation, but at some point the conversation turned—it became competitive. Perhaps Peter told a story in which he was made out to be the hero, that irritated his brother Andrew, and the two began to bicker. Not wanting to be outdone by Peter, perhaps that's when James and John jumped in, asserting their own self-importance. Before long, everyone was talking over everyone else, each insisting that they were more important than the next. It's not difficult to imagine is it?

Jesus spoke up, setting things straight. *No more talk about greatness...I am among you as one who serves.* His words put them in their place, and then, to their horror, Jesus took His place, as a servant, and began to wash their feet. With burning, shameful, faces, they were forced to look at the top of Jesus' head; He knelt before them one by one, took their feet in His hands and began to wash.

We're not told which disciple was first, or last, but we know that Judas was included; lovingly, his feet were washed. Until Jesus made His way to Peter, there's no mention of anyone saying anything—just awkward silence, interrupted by the sound of water, poured over feet, into a basin.

When Jesus got around to Peter, Peter refused. “*No, 'said Peter; 'you shall never wash my feet.*” Jesus, strong and powerful, leader of multitudes, worker of miracles, brilliant teacher and Lord; this is the Jesus Peter knew and followed. But Jesus the foot-washer? The CEO of a Fortune 500 company doesn't scrub the employee bathroom, and the Queen doesn't do her servants' laundry. This was beneath Jesus, degrading, humiliating; surely He must know this!

Peter's horror shows how little he understands the nature and character of God; taking a lowly place, serving the needs of another, does not—cannot—diminish God. It is the glory of God to create, to serve, to redeem; these activities showcase His glory—a very different sort of glory than the kind humanity seeks.

Jesus answered Peter, “*Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.*” This washing of feet was more than a lesson in servant-leadership, it foreshadowed the great cleansing to come. The cross is the place of our cleansing; unless we are washed, cleansed, forgiven, we have no part in the salvation God offers.

When the foot washing was complete, Jesus returned to His place, asking, “*Do you understand what I have done for you?* In the span of five verses, three times Jesus repeats himself: *do for others as I have*

² Luke 22:25-27.

done for you. If no act of love is beneath Jesus, even washing the feet of His betrayer, then no act of love is beneath us.

Vs. 17: “*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*” To know and to do are two separate, but complimentary, actions. There is a blessing that comes from doing what Jesus says.

But, Jean Vanier writes, “The great danger for all of us as human beings—including those in the church—is to love Power. Power can turn us quickly upon ourselves and strengthen our egos. For us to become humble servants who were called to raise up our brothers and sisters is a difficult task. We need to be given the Holy Spirit, who alone can change our hearts... so that we don't seek our own importance, our own power, for our own need to be seen as admirable, as being the best of God's creation or the best of his Church.”³

If John 13 ended with verse 17, we might breathe a little easier. We would be inspired to the noble task of servanthood, fully expecting that as we serve, others will be blessed, and we will know their admiration and thanksgiving. *Mark, thank you so much for how well you have served me, I don't deserve your kindness, your wisdom, your strength...*

If you have never imagined yourself riding the wave of your own greatness, floating on the accolades of others, enthroned on the praise of the people, then either you lack imagination, or, likely, you are living in denial. In proud, bitter, or insecure moments, I have imagined such a coronation. The desire for power, influence, or

praise is deep within us. Only Jesus can remove it. Only we can let Him.

Vs. 18-30: In the second movement of our text, vs. 18-30, the focus is still on Jesus, but another character emerges—a betrayer: Judas. Again, in vs. 19, we have a statement of divine sovereignty; the coming betrayal will not subvert God's purposes. But in spite of this fact, vs. 21, Jesus was troubled in spirit. Jesus knew what was going to happen, He was committed to the Father's plan, secure in the Father's faithfulness, **and**, He was troubled in spirit. We misrepresent an authentic life of faith when we assume that faith will enable us to float above life's circumstances, untouched and undisturbed; not even Jesus experienced this.

When Jesus spoke of betrayal—coming from within the inner circle—all 12 disciples were surprised. 11 were surprised because they could not imagine it; Judas was surprised because somehow Jesus knew. Judas instantly went into fight or flight mode, heart pounding, trouble breathing. If Jesus exposed him, he might not get out alive.

John was seated next to Jesus and Peter motioned to him, “*Ask Him about the betrayer; who is it?*” And so John leaned in and asked, “*Who is it?*” We know from the text that Jesus gave an answer, but what follows seems to indicate that no one heard Jesus' answer except Judas.

Perhaps John was on one side of Jesus, with Judas on the other. John asked, “*Who is it?*” and Jesus leaned towards Judas and whispered, vs. 26, “*It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread' ...Then,*

³ Vanier, 92-93.

dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.” Vs. 27, Then, speaking loud enough for everyone to hear, Jesus said to Judas, “*What you are about to do, do quickly.*” **28** *But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him.*”

Apart from Jesus, only Judas knew the identity of the betrayer. After receiving bread from Jesus' hand, Judas got up and left, and, John remarks, “*it was night*”—the time when darkness reigns.

Why did Judas do what he did? He saw the same miracles as the other 11; he heard the same teaching; he ate, and talked, and walked with Jesus, just like the others.

Some suggest that Judas didn't have a choice; he was chosen by God—before the beginning of time—to play the role of betrayer. In this case, he is an unfortunate soul, chosen for an unenviable task. He is worthy of our pity.

Others suggest that the answer is all in the last name—Judas *Iscariot*. A derivative of *sicarii*, Latin for *dagger-man*, Judas was a part of a Jewish splinter group, revolutionaries, assassins, bent on overthrowing Rome by violent means. Initially, Judas followed Jesus because of His demonstration of power, but when Jesus refused to use His power in the interest of Israel's political freedom, Judas became angry. We cannot verify the historicity of this theory; it's possible, but we don't know.

What we do know is that at some point along the way, Judas grew tired of following Jesus and wanted out. He had followed Jesus long enough to know that He wasn't a fraud; there were too many

healings, miracles, acts of courage, love, and kindness to dismiss. And yet, dismiss Jesus he did. The question is, *why?* Maybe Judas was tired of living hand to mouth. Jesus and disciples had enough to live on, but just barely. We're told that Judas received 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus, but scholars suggest that this amounts to somewhere between one day's wages and the price of a common slave. Not nearly enough to buy a villa on the Sea of Galilee.

Perhaps the foot washing was the last straw. Judas wasn't going to kneel before anyone; if that's where Jesus was leading, Judas wanted out.

We don't know why Judas walked away, but perhaps the more pressing question is **why do any of us walk away from Jesus?** We walk away when we decide that Jesus isn't what we want. We turn away when we don't want to go where He's leading. When the life He offers seems too narrow or too hard. When Jesus doesn't offer enough of this, or that; when He doesn't come to us on our terms, many leave Him behind.

The irony is that we all walk away from Jesus, hoping to find a better life. Judas found only darkness. So too do we.

Vs. 31-38: The final movement in our text focusses on a command Jesus gives—to love—and on the blindness of Peter.

This command to love one another comes on the heels of the earlier foot washing; it's clear that in this command Jesus has more in mind than feeling warmly about others. The call to love is a call to humility, to serve one another, and Jesus is the clear example for

what love looks like. His love crosses the boundary of age, ethnicity, and economic status. His love is expressed in the willing to wait for others; His love is quick to forgive; a love that chooses to believe the best about you (and me), even when they wound Him; His love is humble, generous, and strong. Church, we are called to embody this same love to one another. It is a high, and holy calling, and an impossible one, apart from an ongoing experience of His love.

But shortly after speaking this command, Jesus indicated that He would be leaving His disciples; where He was going, they could not follow. Peter, in vs. 37, asks, “*Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.*” **38** *Then Jesus answered, ‘Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!’”*

In one respect, we are all Peter; our capacity for ignorance and self-deception is greater than we know. Peter was so confident that he knew himself: loyal, courageous, heroic. *Even if everyone else runs Jesus, I will stand by your side, I will lay down my life for you.* In the moment of decision, Peter did the one thing he swore he would never—could never—do, he denied ever knowing Jesus.

Self-awareness is vital; without it, we stumble around in the dark—unaware of who we are, or, the effect we have on the people around us (both good or bad). But we do not arrive at self-awareness simply by thinking about ourselves more. Staring in the mirror or gazing within, cannot solve the mystery of the self.

Ironically, we cannot know ourselves apart from others. Peter thought of himself in one light, but Jesus saw his true face. *Is it not the same for us?* If we are compulsive, proud, demanding, or

impatient, we discover these truths in the company of others. We discover our envy, greed, or competitiveness, by interacting with those who have what we don't, or, who are what we wish to be. I may live unaware of my inner impulse to always be right, to always have the last word, but the people around me see it as plainly as the nose on my face.

It's on reality shows like *American Idol* or *So You Think You Can Dance* that we discover people who imagine themselves as the next big thing, waiting to be discovered. Some are genuinely shocked to discover that others think they are tone-deaf or have two left feet.

I never thought of myself as being angry, until God revealed how deep my anger went. I never thought of myself as selfish, until I encountered the patient love of my wife. Others saw teaching and leadership gifts in me long before I did; I never imagined being on a stage, let alone being a pastor.

It's in the company of other that we come to know who we are. You may be strong, creative, wise, quick to listen or help; there are things that others see in you—good things—that you may not know about yourself. And as Christians, we believe that we cannot know ourselves apart from the One who made us and redeemed us. In fact, a Christian believes that what God says about them is the truest word spoken, for He sees and knows everything.

Jesus sees and knows you just as clearly as He saw and knew Peter. The words Jesus spoke to Peter were not meant to shame, harm, or condemn; they were spoken gently, truthfully. We do not progress very far in life when we live with a false image of ourselves, or of God. In time, Peter learned this truth and so must we.

The Last Supper and The Lord's Supper

At the Last Supper, Jesus didn't dine with the spiritually elite; those sinless few who had climbed to the dizzying heights of holiness. He ate with twelve men, who in a matter of hours, would either betray, deny, or abandon Him. But knowing all of this, Jesus said to His disciples, "*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*"⁴ Jesus willingly, lovingly, welcomed those who would soon reject Him. More than any other meal, the Last Supper was an act of loving, generous, welcome.

When you think about God, is this the image that comes to mind—loving, generous, welcoming? When you think about the Lord's Supper, do you sense the loving, generous, welcome of God?

Think for a moment about power of meals. There's nothing magical about sharing a pot of soup, or dividing up that last Yorkshire Pudding. The power isn't in the food, it's in the connection and communication with the people around the table. To eat the Lord's Supper is to commune with God.

In the Middle Ages, the Lord's Supper was understood in a quasi-magical light; as though the bread and wine had a power in and of itself to save. This is not the case; the power of this Meal isn't in the food, it's in the One who Hosts us; the power to forgive, heal, and transform lies in the One with whom we commune. This is Christ's Meal, He is our Host, present by the Holy Spirit, and we come to commune with Him—the One who loves us.

And so, if there is desire in your heart today, to know Jesus, to follow Jesus, to receive His love, then this meal is for you. In a few brief moments, you will be invited to come and receive.

At this time I want to invite the worship team to come and join me on stage, and as they do, allow me to offer a few, brief instructions.

We find ourselves in the middle of cold and flu season, and, concerns about the corona virus continue to increase. While it appears that, for the moment, the virus is contained in our Province, we want to be prudent. The symbolism of this shared meal is important to us and so we have endeavoured to find a way to share it together, while minimizing risk. After discussing protocol with 2 physicians in our congregation, we are going to shift our practice for the time being.

Instead of each one coming forward, taking your own bread and dipping it in the juice, our servers—who have washed and sanitized their hands—will do this for you.

One of our servers take a piece of bread, dips it in the cup and "drop" it into your hand—we do have napkins if you wish. As you come to receive, may you know the loving welcome of God: the body of Christ was broken for you, the blood of Christ was shed for you.

Worship

Invitation to Prayer

⁴ Luke 22:15.

Announcement:

We are assessing the situation with COVID -19. At this point we would like to recommend people over 70, and those who are younger, with underlying health conditions stay home next Sunday. We are planning to post the recorded service online in the late afternoon. We are also working towards streaming the service live if the virus spreads in BC.

Benediction