

John 13:1-35—Loved to Love
College Baptist Church
April 1, 2021—Maundy Thursday

Introduction

Good Evening on this Maundy Thursday. Maundy—is a word derived from the Latin “mandatum”—meaning mandate or command. And it was on a Thursday long ago that Jesus gathered his closest disciples—the 12 Apostles—for a very special Passover meal. And at that meal, Jesus exemplified his love in a powerful way, before *commanding* his disciples to love one another.

So, on this Thursday night, we have gathered to consider the example of Jesus’ love and his command to love one another. We will do that by hearing from the thirteenth chapter of John’s Gospel, by singing songs of God’s love, and by partaking of the Lord’s Supper—a meal which reminds us of God’s great love for us in Christ. So, please join me in prayer as we begin this special time of worship.

The Humble and Complete Love of Jesus

Before I begin this evening, I feel compelled to make a little wardrobe change. This sportscoat just doesn’t seem right for the occasion. Just a minute while I put on this apron. And while I’m at it, I think I’ll roll up my sleeves—the cuffs can be a little restrictive when preaching.

Now, don’t answer this question out loud, but how did my wardrobe change make you feel? Awkward? Embarrassed? Puzzled? Shocked? Well, I have to imagine that Jesus’ disciples felt all those feelings and more when he got up from the Passover feast and proceeded to lay aside his outer garments and take a towel and tie it around his waist. But the shock did not end with the change of garments. The shock continued when, according to verse 5, “*Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*”

This was shocking not because the disciples had never had someone wash their feet. Foot-washing was common in the ancient world, where roads were dusty and sandals didn’t keep off the dirt and mud and grime. So, foot-washing wasn’t the shock. It was the identity of the foot-washer that was a shock. You see, only the lowliest slaves in society washed the feet of others. One scholar suggests that “*There is no instance in either Jewish or Greco-Roman sources of a superior washing the feet of an inferior.*” (Carson, 462). And here was Jesus, their Teacher and Master—their superior, doing the humiliating work of a humble slave.

It is this shock that led Peter to exclaim in verse 6, “*Lord, do you wash my feet?*” And then in verse 7, “*You shall never wash my feet.*” Jesus’ actions shocked Peter. And I believe that is just what Jesus wanted. Jesus wanted to give Peter and the other disciples a tangible example of his shockingly, humble love. The love of Jesus is shockingly humble. The Lord and Master stoops down from his rightful position of honor to serve. By washing their feet, he is reminding them that love is more than emotion; love is a humble action. The love of Jesus is shockingly humble. And as an expression of his shockingly humble love, Jesus stooped down to wash their dirty, grimy, smelly feet.

But Jesus' love is not only humble. His love is complete. There is a line in verse 1 that is important to note. The last phrase of verse 1 says, "*he loved them to the end.*" To say that Jesus loved his disciples "*to the end*" is to say that he loved them to the uttermost as some translations put it, or that he loved them completely. Like a runner, who runs to the *end* of the course, who doesn't pull up short, who completes the race, Jesus loved his disciples to the end, completely—even "*to the end*" of his very own life. This is a veiled reference to the fact that his earthly ministry and life is drawing to a close—that "*his hour had come to depart out of this world.*" But Jesus would love them right up to his last breath on the cross. In fact, his death would be the ultimate expression of his complete love.

You see, what the disciples did not yet fully understand or know is that foot-washing was *not* the *most* shockingly humble and complete act of love by Jesus. In a matter of hours, Jesus would humble himself to the point of utter humiliation by dying on the cross of Calvary—a death reserved for criminals, a death that symbolized the curse of God in the Jewish world. At the cross, we see the ultimate expression of Jesus' humble, complete love.

And sinners desperately need the humble, complete love of Jesus. Jesus explains the necessity of his love to Peter when he says in v. 8, "*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*" This statement of Jesus changes Peter's tune. In verses 6-7, Peter passionately resisted the foot-washing of Jesus, but by verse 9, Peter says "*Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head.*" In other words, wash all of me. If that's what it takes to share life and have fellowship with you, Jesus, wash all of me with your humble, complete love.

So, again, we see that the foot-washing was an anticipation of what was about to come, when Jesus would shed his blood on the cross of Calvary to wash away the sins of his people. The symbolic foot-washing is a reminder that according to John 1:29, Jesus is "*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" And unless you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, you are still dirty. You have no share with Jesus.

As the old-revival hymn asks...

Are you washed in the blood, in the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb? Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Because all those who have repented of their sin and turned to Jesus in faith have been cleansed by his humble and complete love. As 1 John 1:9 famously puts it, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Thank God for the humble and complete love of Jesus. But that is not the only lesson of that Thursday—to simply bask in the humble and complete love of Jesus. No, there is a commandment too—a mandate. That's what makes it *Maundy* Thursday.

The New Commandment to Love

Jesus says in verse 34, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*"

Now as I have said before, the commandment to love isn't really anything new. After all, loving God and loving others is the perfect way to sum up the ten commandments according to Jesus. So, in what way is this a *new* commandment? It is new *standard* of love. To say "*love one another, just as I have loved you*" is a call to Jesus' new, high standard of humble and complete love.

Just after washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus said to them in verses 14-15, "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*" Now, some Christian traditions have understood this command with strict literalism. Jesus washed his disciples' feet, so we should literally wash one another's feet. And if you have ever participated in a foot-washing ceremony it can be very moving.

But in this context, it is abundantly clear that Jesus was not simply commanding the act of foot-washing. He was actually calling them to something much greater. He was calling them to shockingly humble love. He was calling them to a kind of love that is often foreign to the world around us. He was calling them to stoop low—embarrassingly and shockingly low—to love one another in acts of humble service. This kind of humble love is willing to get dirty and messy for the sake of others. This kind of humble love is willing to give up privilege to bless those in need. This kind of love serves babies in the nursery and rakes leaves at the church and calls on the sick.

And it is also a call to complete love—a love "to the end." In John 15:12-13, just a page or two ahead in your Bible, Jesus said to his disciples more explicitly, "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*" Wow! That is a radically new idea—to lay your life down for someone else; and Jesus provided the example when he died on the cross for our sins.

Now let me be clear, Jesus isn't calling us to die for the sins of another—only he can do that. But he is calling us to follow his example of complete love—even unto death, the end. Now most likely, you won't have to physically die for your fellow Christians. But complete love does "die to self"—that is, giving up your own livelihood for the good of others. Maybe giving up your money—to give to missions? Maybe giving up your time—to serve in Sunday School or the Sound Booth? Maybe giving up your personal preferences—to befriend someone different than you? And maybe, just maybe, giving up your physical life should someone try to hurt or harm your fellow Christians.

Brothers and sisters, we have been loved in order to love. Jesus has extended to us his humble and complete love...and we are now commanded to extend that humble and complete love to one another. So, whenever we come to this table, we come not only to embrace the love of Jesus, but also to embrace the command of Jesus to love one another. Let's pray.

Benediction

Though I did not comment on it in my message, you heard in the Scripture readings that “betrayal” was lurking in the darkness at this Last Supper. Judas had left in the dark of night to orchestrate the arrest of Jesus. And so, we leave tonight knowing that the cross is on the horizon for Jesus. With that somber thought in mind, I ask that you depart in silence tonight. And I invite you to join us at 5:30 tomorrow afternoon as we reflect on the events of Good Friday together.

Now receive this benediction. Having been loved by the humble and complete love of Jesus, go and do likewise to one another.