

Love One Another: “Through Community”

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Reading from the Gospel according to John.

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. The evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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.

[1:07] He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then Lord Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. 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. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

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. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

[2:10] Very truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

A new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Good morning, Christ Church. If you see some people here today who look like they are part of the same gene pool as me and share my DNA, your eyes are not playing tricks on you.

We are delighted to have my brother and his family here with us today. And they have offered, yes, they have offered to host a Q&A; after this service so that you can ask all those questions you have been wanting to know.

Like, what is up with Jonathan? You all seem so well adjusted. What happened? You can ask them later today. But we are going through the gospel of John, and we are in this kind of like moment where we are preparing for the 20th birthday of our church.

[3:25] And we are using some text in the gospel of John to help us renew our sense of our mission and our commitment to that mission. And we have said the past few weeks that it is just so important when you sit down to hammer out your mission, vision, and values of a new organization, a new

institution, that you clearly and adequately capture your core identity and your core purpose.

Who are we? Why are we here? What do we exist to do? And I remember when we were crafting the mission statement of Christ Church, we were not satisfied to simply say that we exist to lead people into a deeper relationship with Christ and His church and just kind of leave it there because we were concerned to add these words through community.

We want to lead people into a deeper relationship with Christ and His church through community. We didn't want people to think that, you know, you can attend a worship service two or three times a month or serve once a month on a ministry team and give an occasional financial gift and that that would be the extent of your involvement in the mission.

We wanted to emphasize the personal relationships, the relational fellowship that a living church and a dynamic church is meant to experience and express.

And so we wanted to push people. We wanted you to be thinking about all the aspects of what it means to be part of a dynamic Christian community that we don't just limit ourselves to a Sunday morning gathering but rather our community extends Monday to Saturday that we are a people who break bread together, that we open the Bible together, we pray together, we bring meals when you get sick and when you have a baby, we go on a walk when you're discouraged, we drive you to the airport, we watch each other's kids, we tutor your struggling student, we visit you in the hospital, we help you move.

[5:43] And so today I want to kind of bore down on this question, not just what is a good community, a good human community, but what is an authentically Christian community?

What does a Christ-centered and Christ-like community feel like and how do we cultivate such a community? And I think John 13 is very helpful because Jesus knew that this was the last time that he would have with his disciples before he went to the cross.

And so he's giving them this intensive graduate level training course. And John 13 to 17 is the longest single body of Jesus' teaching that we have in the New Testament.

And he addresses some aspects of Christian community that I think are critical for us to get a hold of here in John 13. And we're going to talk about three things.

First of all, a community of downward mobility, a community of gracious sacrifice, and a community of one-anothering love.

[6:51] A community of downward mobility, a community of gracious sacrifice, and a community of one-anothering love. Let's start with a community of downward mobility. In verse 1 it says it was just before the Passover festival, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father.

And having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. In less than 24 hours, Jesus is going to die on the cross. And by this time, tomorrow on Good Friday, the lifeless body of Jesus will be carried to the garden tomb.

And Jesus, well aware that this is his certain destiny, he wants to show his disciples what it means to love them to the end. And so it says in verse 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.

And so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist. And 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.

Jesus, knowing what was at stake with his disciples, he wasn't talking with them about the weather, or sports, or the NCAA tournament, or politics, or international affairs, or the rising and falling of the stock market.

[8:21] He was talking with them about the things that were most crucial for their life with God. In fact, Jesus actually wasn't even really talking with them at all. He was showing them something.

And what was he showing them? Well, we know that in the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this is the moment where Jesus' disciples were arguing with each other about which of them was the greatest disciple.

And Jesus, in the midst of that argument, he tells them, I am among you as the one who serves. And it was clear in that moment that none of the disciples were prepared to wash the feet of Jesus. None of them were prepared to wash each other's feet. And so, Jesus, in that moment, puts himself in the position that they should have been in.

Jesus says he rose from the table, he took off his outer garments, and he tied the towel around his waist. Now, let's just pause there to make a cultural observation that what Jesus is doing here socially is not just jarring, but it's offensive.

[9:32] Because people, as you know, they didn't wear socks and shoes like we do. They wore sandals. It was hot. It was arid. They needed sandals on their feet. But also, very few first century homes had toilets and sewers like ours do.

And so, they would take the refuse of chamber pots, and very often those would be dumped out into the streets. Add on to that the manure of animals going up and down on the streets and the accumulation of food waste.

An ancient street could be a pretty nasty place. And so, when you would arrive at a meal, you would arrive with pretty stinky, pretty grimy feet.

And the question is, who is it that is to wash those feet? And the answer was, a slave. That was the job of a slave.

And not a high-ranking slave, mind you. But the lowest of the low. This was such an undignified and reviled task that later rabbis would not allow Jews to carry out this role.

[10:42] But I want to also not just make a cultural observation. I want to make a theological observation here that at this Passover feast, Jesus is the host. Jesus is the teacher.

And therefore, he's a person of high status. He's a person with great social honor. But he's so much more than just a host and a teacher. It says again in verse 3, that Jesus knew the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

Now, if you and I were to finish that sentence, that Jesus knew he had all things put under him, under his power by God, that he had come from God and that he was going to God, we probably would have finished that sentence and we would have written, Jesus then displayed the majesty of the one who possesses all authority in the universe.

And Jesus, of course, does know that he's co-eternal with the Father in dignity and majesty and glory and power. He knows that from all eternity, he's been face to face with God himself, that he's been the one in closest relationship to the Father and that in just a little while, he's going back to sit on the very throne of God.

Jesus knows himself to be the Lord of all and yet what does he do with that power? He humbles himself.

[12:15] He becomes the lowest of the lowest slave and he begins to wash the dirty feet of his disciple community that frankly was just too self-concerned about who was the greatest to wash Jesus' feet, to untie his sandals.

And in this prophetic action, in this acted parable, the Son of the living God, the King of heaven, the Lord of glory, the Word made flesh, he's giving us a sketch in miniature of the larger portrait of his overall humiliation.

If we can pull up a slide, I hope we have a slide that you can see. Many scholars like to point out the striking parallel between this text and Philipians chapter 2.

I don't know if we have that or not. Maybe, maybe not. Okay. Don't worry about it. If you know Philipians chapter 2, the Apostle Paul is writing there that Jesus began in the highest glory of heaven and that he then came down into the deepest depths of the human condition into a world full of dirty feet and grimy souls.

And he emptied himself. He humbled himself. He took the lowliest position of a slave in order to accomplish our cleansing from sin by his death on the cross.

[13:40] And then the Apostle Paul says then he was exalted to the highest place, to the highest place of honor at the right hand of the Father. And this, in the New Testament, is the V shape of God's rescue operation.

There's the downward mobility of Jesus' humiliation and then there's the upward mobility of his exaltation. The downward mobility of Jesus' incarnation and his crucifixion and the upward mobility of his resurrection and his ascension.

And what Jesus is showing us is that the way up is actually the way down. And this foot washing is not simply the humble service of a man to his equals, nor is it even the service of a good man to others less fortunate than himself.

But rather this foot washing and the crucifixion to which it points is Jesus' way of showing us who God is and what God is like. This is the humble service of God to sinful humanity in need of cleansing.

There's a downward mobility in the heart of God. There's a downward mobility in the mind of Christ. Let's just pause here for some application. What does this mean for us?

[15:00] Well, first of all, if you're here exploring Christianity, I want you to consider whether or not the other world religions have anything like what is going on here in this text.

If you read Buddha and you read Muhammad, they are repeatedly and clearly denying that they are God. They're very often pointing away from themselves and saying, that is the light as far as I understand it, so follow that.

Follow the light. And Jesus, on the other hand, is pointing to himself and he's saying, I am the light of the world, follow me. I'll be the one to lead you out of the darkness. Buddha and Muhammad are very often saying, that is the way.

Walk in it. That is the truth. Trust it. That is the life. Go live that life. And Jesus, he's pointing to himself and saying, I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. And no one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is constantly making these astonishing claims that no other religious leader has made. and yet notice that his foot washing is the exact opposite of his claims.

[16:12] In Jesus Christ, you have this striking juxtaposition between the loftiness of his claims and the lowliness of his behavior. is there any other religion in which you see the master making such incredible claims about himself and yet humbling himself to wash the feet of his disciples?

What the gospels are telling us is that here in the stooping figure of the slave is revealed for us the majesty of the one true God. The second application is if you're a Christian, the early church said that Jesus' downward mobility was to be a defining mark of the disciple community.

And they said this right here is the measure of greatness among us. The one who most humbles himself, the one who goes the lowest, the one who gets the most dirty, the one who acts most like a slave, the one who does the most menial of tasks.

The apostle Peter who we'll talk about in a moment, he has a front row seat to this, he experiences the foot washing himself. And he writes a letter later on to Christians who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire and he says in 1 Peter 5, Peter says, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.

And that verb clothe reflects the picture of a slave who's tying a towel around his waist. He says, clothe yourselves like Jesus clothed himself with humility toward one another.

[17:49] Or think about the apostle Paul. Anyone know the first words that Paul writes in his magisterial letter to the church in Rome? His first words are Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus.

Can you imagine waking up tomorrow morning and saying, that is who I am, Jonathan, a slave of Christ Jesus. But Paul goes on and he writes to the Christian community in Corinth and he says, he says to them, we are slaves, we are your slaves for Jesus' sake.

So to the, to a Christian community, the mark of Christian community is that we are a people who kneel down in our hearts before our fellow disciples and by our humble service we say, I am your servant for Jesus' sake.

And that's the test. That's how you know that you've come in contact with an authentically Christian community. It's a community of downward mobility.

It's a community that says, I'm a slave of yours for Jesus' sake. But secondly, not just a community of downward mobility but a community of gracious sacrifice.

[19:05] I want us to think about a community of gracious sacrifice. In verse five, again it says, after that he poured water into a basin and

began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with a towel that was wrapped around him.

And I want us to notice that Jesus is graciously loving his disciple community in the face of forces that would stop most of us from loving other people in this moment. Because I think most of us would say, you know, when I'm under intense stress, when I'm under incredible pressure and strain, I tend to kind of focus more on myself, right?

But Jesus knows that in the next 24 hours he's going to die. And yet in the face of his impending death, who's he thinking about? He's thinking about the needs of each one of his disciples.

And notice that Jesus loves his disciples in spite of their unworthiness. Jesus in a moment is going to predict that Judas will betray him and that Peter will deny him and that the rest are going to abandon him.

And we don't know which of those disciples Jesus started with in the foot washing. We don't know where he began. But we do know that Jesus eventually washed the guy who was about to have him killed.

[20:22] And then he washed the feet of each one who would forsake him and hurt him terribly within the next 24 hours. And Jesus is just graciously loving each disciple without exception.

And he's not doing what I do and what you may do sometimes. He's not doing a cost-benefit analysis of his little disciple community there.

He's not evaluating each disciple on what, let's see, what have they done for me lately? How much am I getting out of this relationship with this disciple? At no point is Jesus saying, you know, I'll be in this community as long as it's making me happy, as long as it's fulfilling my needs.

But the moment it's not, I'm out of here. No, Jesus, it says he loves his disciples to the end. He's not loving them because they're great, he's loving them because he's great.

He's loving them with the power of unconditional electing love. He's loving them with a gracious love that loves to the end. A love that will never forsake you, even when I'm getting nothing out of the relationship, even when this relationship is costing me terribly.

[21:40] And at some point, Jesus, coming around the circle of all the disciples, he gets to the leader. He gets to the leader of the twelve, and this is what it says in verse six.

He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? And Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you will understand.

And Peter said, no, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. And then, Lord, Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

See, when Jesus gazes into Peter's eyes as he's about to wash him, Peter protests. And it's like Peter saying, you know, you shouldn't be doing the work of a slave.

Isn't there some other slave around here that we could get to do this job? But I think Peter is also kind of saying, hey, Jesus, I just took a bath. I'm not really that dirty.

[22:42] Like, do we have to do this foot washing? But Jesus here is speaking about a different kind of dirt. Right? When Jesus says, unless I wash you, you can have no part with me in the salvation that I bring, he's saying, Peter, I'm not talking about the dirt on your feet.

Peter, I'm talking about the fact that you're spiritually dirty. I'm talking about the fact that you are morally grimy, that morally you stink.

And Jesus, I'm sure, has that phrase in Psalm 51 that he's memorized in his mind in this moment that says, wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

And he's saying, Peter, that's the kind of washing, that's the kind of cleansing that you need me to do for you. And yet, Peter here is saying, I don't think I'm too dirty.

I don't think it calls for such drastic measures, Jesus. And perhaps you feel the same way about yourself. That yes, I've made some mistakes, but on the whole, I'm a good and a decent person.

[23:50] I've said some things that I regret. I've done some things that I wish I could do over, but I'm not really sure if it's necessary for me to be washed by the eternal Son of God.

And Jesus says to Peter, he says in verse 7, you do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you will understand. He's saying, Peter, what I'm doing now is pointing to what I'm going to do later on my cross.

This foot washing is a signpost to my humiliating and cleansing death. And Peter, if you refuse the sign of what I've come to do, if you reject the reality to which the sign points, my dying on the cross to wash away your sins, then you can have absolutely no share in the salvation that I've come to bring.

And Peter, you've got to love Peter because he's got that personality that just goes from one extreme to the other. And Peter says, well, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well.

Give me a bath. Just make my whole body and my whole soul clean right here, right now. Why do we have to wait for your cleansing work on the cross tomorrow?

[25:07] Let's just do it here and now. And I wish we could, we had the time to go into what Jesus says to Peter but he basically says, hey, chill out, brother. But let's just pause for some application about what this means for us.

Again, if you're here and you're exploring Christianity, you need to hear the word that Jesus says to Peter. He says, unless I wash you, you can have no part with me.

You need to be washed of the filth of your self-centeredness. You need to be washed of the grime of your inordinate self-love.

And if you spend enough time with Jesus, you'll realize that he doesn't just want to wash you from head to foot but he wants to wash you from the outside to the inside. He wants to wash you in places you didn't even know were there.

He wants you to wash you in places you didn't even know were dirty. But don't make the mistake of saying, well, if I just follow Jesus' example, if I just serve people enough and I love people enough, then I can kind of cleanse myself.

[26:20] No, before you, the gospel says that before you imitate Jesus as your example, you need to trust Jesus as your Savior. That as your Savior, Jesus must come first perform a service on you.

He has to cleanse you. He has to forgive you. He has to reconcile you to God. He has to justify you in a right relationship with your Heavenly Father. He must do that first.

And then, having served you as your Savior, He can then be your example and He can show you how to live out His salvation in a transformed life of service to others.

So the first question you have to ask yourself is, do I need to be washed? And who will wash me? Who has the power to really deeply wash me?

And who's trustworthy enough? Who's died for me? Who's bled for me and shown that they love me that much? But the second point of application is that if you're a Christian, the way that we approach our relationships in the Christian community is not, how is this person treating me and then I will do the same for them?

[27:39] But rather, the question is, how has the Lord Jesus treated me? And that is the model for the way that I'll treat others. With Jesus' power, I will display the same gracious sacrifice that I've received from Him that He's shown to me.

If the Lord of glory has graciously washed those dirtiest parts of my soul, those grimeiest parts of my innermost being, then it's only appropriate that I would turn around and love the way that I've been loved by Jesus.

Now, I don't know if you're like me, but I say, yes, I'm all about that, but I also have kind of a list of exceptions. that I will do what Jesus did for me, but not for Him.

Surely not for her. I'm not pointing to any particular people right now, by the way. He's a difficult person to love. She can be a real pain in the neck.

Why should I serve them? Why should I kneel down before them? They don't deserve it. But you see, if Jesus had said, I'm only going to invest my time and my energy to serve people who will never abandon me, never betray me, never deny me, none of us would be here today, would we?

[29:05] None of the disciples deserved what Jesus is giving them here, and none of us deserve it either, but we got it. He washed away the dirt of our self-centeredness.

He bought us with His blood. We don't belong to ourselves anymore, and so we don't get to do it the way we would normally do it because we have a new master. We got to do things His way.

So the Christian community is meant to be a community of downward mobility. It's meant to be a community of gracious sacrifice, but let me close by talking about the way we're to be a community of one-anothering love.

We're called to be a community of one-anothering love. Isadora Duncan was the mother of modern dance? I think she lived here in San Francisco, and she would often quip, she would say, if I could say it, I wouldn't have to dance it.

If I could say it, I wouldn't have to dance it, and in some ways that's what Jesus is doing. He's saying, let me show you the dance, and then let me explain the dance. I'll show you the dance, and then we'll talk about the why of the dance and the how of the dance.

[30:15] And so it says in verse 12, when Jesus had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and he returned to his place and he said, do you understand what I have done for you? You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. And down in verse 34, a new command, I give you love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Quick Greek lesson. The Greek verb *phileo* is about the affectionate love between friends.

And the Greek verb *eraiō* is about the passionate love between a husband and a wife. And the Greek verb *stergō* is about the familial love between a parent and a child.

But Jesus right now, he's preparing his disciples for some tumultuous days ahead, for some really hard decades ahead. And so he says, you're going to need a love that's more potent than any of those loves.

[31:22] And so the word he uses here is *agapao*. This is the unconditional self-giving love that sacrificially seeks what is best for the other.

It's the divine love at the heart of the Trinity. It's this unselfish love, this giving love that is to define the relationships in Jesus' disciple community. And what Jesus is saying here, he says, *agapao* each other as I have *agapao'd* you.

Love each other out of the love that I'm showing you. And he says, I've set you an example. And that word example really pictures a child who doesn't know how to write, right?

They're sitting down, they're learning their letters. And the teacher comes up to the board, the teacher writes a word, the teacher writes a sentence, and then the child copies the pattern of the sentence.

And now I want you to learn my dance moves. I want you to follow my dance steps. Jesus is saying, I've taken that most shameful place as a servant of sinners.

[32:32] And that means that you owe me a debt having taken that place for you. But what he's saying is that now the debt you owe to me is to be discharged by your subjection to one another in loving service.

That the people in these pews, the people in your community group, the people in your discipleship group, these are the appointed ones. These are the ones I've appointed to receive everything that you owe to me and your master.

I want you to give to them. *Agapao* them. Become a copy of me to him. Become a copy of me to her.

And this brings me to your little bookmark that you received today. It's a wonderful, wonderful book by Gerald Sitzler and it's wonderful to read with your community group or with your family because it explores this *agapao*, self-giving love in all of its multifaceted dimensions.

But I'll just mention a few of these aspects of love. He says, you know, when we welcome one another, it's all about, in the church context, it's all about seeing that stranger that walks into the door and not saying, oh, there's a stranger, but saying, oh, there's a friend that I have not yet met.

[33:56] It means that you take the initiative and you go to them and you open your heart to them and you open your home to them and you ask their name and you remember their name and you welcome them and you say, you're not a stranger, you're a brother.

You're not a stranger, you're a sister. And Sitzer says that prayer, prayer is perhaps the greatest service we can render to the disciple community because prayer is the thing that touches us at the deepest part of our lives in those places that we cannot touch.

It's a way that we love and we serve each other by praying for each other. He says that another way that we serve people is that we give them our time. And here in the Bay Area, time is often much harder to give even than our money, right?

We're so busy. And time, giving our time means that we've got to simplify our lives. We've got to sacrificially release more and more of our time to serve this person or to encourage this person. You can't serve someone, you can't encourage them without giving them your time. And Sitzer says that when you see these things working in a Christian community, welcoming and praying and serving and encouraging, he says, you will recognize the most Christ-like person in your midst by the ease and the spontaneity with which they do those little annoying and messy things that no one else wants to do.

[35:32] They do the kind of things that in the ancient world a slave would do. Right? They do the kind of things that we are secretly hoping somebody else will do because I just really don't want to waste my time.

Jesus says, you know, I want you to do this for each other because I've already done that for you. And why should we do this? What's the motivation to do this? Jesus ends, he says in verse 35, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

It's just inevitable that people are going to form their view of the Lord Jesus from your life and my life. Whether we like it or not. And Jesus is telling us that the embodied expression of this agapao love that Jesus has for us, when that's operative in the life of our community, everyone will identify it as belonging to Jesus.

And so the question is, have you committed yourself have you committed yourself yet to a community of people here with whom you can live out these one another commands?

[36:51] People with whom you can pray and serve and encourage and comfort and admonish in all the ways, all the multifaceted ways Jesus wants us to love one another because he says, not only will you be blessed if you do these things, but Jesus says, this is how everyone around us, everyone in our networks, everyone in our city is going to know what the love of Jesus is like when they see it embodied among us.

And friends, we can kneel down before one another and we can say to each other, I am your servant for Jesus' sake precisely because the greatest power in the universe has already knelt down.

And he's not just knelt down to wash our feet, he knelt all the way down to the cross to bleed for us, to die for us, to serve us, and to save us.

And so he says, now that you know I've done that for you, please, agapao, one another. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen.

Amen.