

John 13:1-21

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 January 2026

Preacher: Rev. Jacob Vandiver

[0 : 00] Pray with me. Heavenly Father, would you soften our hearts to receive your word this morning, that we might see clearly the beauty of Jesus, and that his sacrificial love for us would melt our hearts and make us yours today.

We pray for you to sanctify us by your word. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Please be seated. Well, I'm going to add my welcome to Jordan's. It is very good to be with you this morning. If I've not met you, my name is Jacob. I'm one of the ministers here at St. John's.

Chris Lay, who's supposed to be here this morning, is unwell, so I'm filling in for him. So very delighted to be with you. Happy 2026. It is hard to believe that it's already here. I thought that I would start out this morning with a little bit of a confession.

I am terrible with New Year's resolutions. And do people still make New Year's resolutions? Is this a thing we do? No? Yes? Well, if I'm honest, I'm such a pessimist. I don't even want to make the resolution because I know I'm going to fail at it miserably.

So if I don't make the resolution, I don't have to be upset or disappointed when I can't keep it. But I am interested in this tradition of New Year's resolutions when we all sort of collectively take stock of our lives.

[1 : 31] Isn't that interesting? And we ask the big picture questions. How do I live the kind of life that I want to be living? What do I need to add or take away to my life to realize the life that I want?

It's very interesting that we do this as a culture. And it really lines up well with the big question that's going to be framing our sermon series that starts today. We're back in John's Gospel and we're picking up in John chapter 13.

So join me there on page 900 if you closed your Bible already. The sermon series is called Formed by Jesus. And here's the big question that will be in the background of this study over the next 12 weeks.

How do we live as disciples of Jesus? Like what's the foundation of our lives as disciples? How do we live it out in the day to day?

It's a very relevant question for all of us. Whether you've been a Christian for five months or for 50 years. Just like we take stock of our lives at the beginning of the new year. From time to time we need to pause and take stock of our Christian lives.

[2 : 43] And ask this question. How do we live as disciples of Jesus? In this section of John's Gospel chapters 13 to 17. Jesus is answering this question.

This is the night before he's crucified. The first 12 chapters of John have been kinetic. Jesus has been moving from place to place. Engaging with lots of people.

Teaching huge crowds. Facing down religious leaders. But here in chapter 13 the plot stops. And before he goes on to suffer death on the Roman cross to save the world.

And before he's resurrected and ascends to the Father. Jesus pauses to teach his disciples. To prepare them for this question. How do we live as disciples of Jesus after he's gone?

And these five chapters are almost exclusively Jesus speaking to and praying for his disciples. And so in this series we want to hear the Lord's teaching.

[3 : 50] And we want to let it shape how we live as his people today. And in our passage this morning in chapter 13. Jesus begins this teaching by teaching us one fundamental truth.

And here it is. That the cross of Christ is the center of the Christian life. The cross of Christ is the center of the Christian life.

Jesus' sacrificial love put on display when he died for us on the cross. That's the center of gravity for the whole Christian life.

Everything else revolves around it. Everything we believe. Everything that we say. Everything that we confess. Everything that we do. revolves around that central fact.

And here in John 13. Jesus teaches this by washing his disciples' feet. Jesus often taught in parables.

[4 : 52] And this is like a parable that he's acting out for his disciples. It's like an object lesson for them and for us. And so we want to spend some time with this.

And look at the details to see what he means. And this passage divides very nicely into two sections. Right where the paragraph break is in the Pew Bible.

So in the first half verses 1 to 11. This is the foot washing. This is the object lesson that teaches us what the cross is. In the second half verses 12 to 20.

This is Jesus sitting back down with his disciples. And teaching them what the cross means. For their lives as his people. So what the cross is. And what the cross means.

That will be the structure of the sermon. So let's get into this first section. The foot washing. And here remember Jesus is teaching what the cross is.

[5 : 50] And again he doesn't do this by laying out propositions for us. He teaches this by serving his disciples. And there are four things I think.

At least four things that come through. And this is the first thing. It's that the cross is a willing sacrifice.

The cross is a willing sacrifice. It's a willing act of sacrificial love from Jesus to us. And we see this in the first few verses. Look with me.

The Passover is coming. Which in John symbolizes Jesus' sacrifice. And Satan has already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him.

The schemes of everyone who hated Jesus. Human and demonic. Are in motion and they're rumbling on towards his inevitable death. And yet what do we see?

[6 : 48] Six times throughout this passage. Jesus knows it. He knows it. He knows it. He knows it. He knows what's happening behind the scenes.

What's not clear to anybody else is clear to Jesus. He knows that his hour has come. That he will die in less than 24 hours. And yet he willingly walks toward the cross.

He's in total control. He's not a victim of these circumstances. He goes willingly to his death for you and me. Why?

It's verse 1. Because he loved his people. He loved them. He loved his own who were in the world. And he loved them to the end.

That is, he loved them to the fullest extent possible. That's the first thing that we see here. That Jesus lays down his life willingly because he loves us.

[7 : 52] It's amazing. And the second thing is this. Is that this sacrificial love on the cross is absolutely shocking.

It's shocking. It's a shocking display of humility from the one who is all powerful. Look at verse 3. Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into his hands.

And he had come from God and was going back to God. He's the incarnate word. He's from the father. Everything was made through him.

Everything was made for him. Everything's in his hands. He's glorious. He's majestic. He's powerful. And yet what does he do? Keep looking at verses 4 and 5.

He rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garment. This is a sign of him laying aside his glory. And he took a towel.

[8 : 53] He tied it around his waist. He poured water into a basin and began washing the disciples' feet. And to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John here is spelling out in vivid detail the actions and the posture of what?

Of a slave. A slave. The one who created us. The one through whom everything was made becomes a slave for us.

Today we don't have a good point of reference for foot washing. We live in a pretty hygienic culture. But in this time people wore sandals everywhere and they walked on dusty and dirty roads.

If you've ever been hiking in sandals you know how dirty your feet can get, right? But this is worse than that. And this time often in cities you'd be walking through all manner of filth and refuse.

And your feet would get really, really nasty. And so it was common when you came down for a dinner you would sit and wash your feet.

[10 : 03] Just to be presentable. But to have someone else wash your feet. This was an incredibly low task. To get your hands dirty by touching the filth on somebody else's feet.

It's the job for a slave. So you can imagine the disciples' shock when Jesus, their master, gets up from his dinner. And he starts to do this.

It's shocking. And the shock of it is voiced by Peter. God bless Peter, the one who says what everybody else is thinking. It's verse 6.

He says, Lord, do you wash my feet? He knows how improper this is. If anything, he should be washing Jesus' feet.

But that's exactly the point. Jesus turns the power dynamic between them right on its head. Why? Because of love.

[11 : 06] He loves him. And so he willingly stoops and serves him. And Jesus says in verse 7, Peter, you don't understand this now, but afterward you will understand.

After what? After Peter sees Jesus hanging on the cross. Then he will know. He will remember this foot washing and the meaning of it will come flooding in.

That for no other reason than his great love for him, God humbled himself to die in his place, to cleanse him from his sin, and to save him from the penalty of it.

The love and the humility of Jesus on the cross is absolutely shocking. Totally unexpected. And yet, amazingly, we're naturally prone to reject this amazing love.

Whether because of embarrassment or whether because of pride. Again, Peter puts this to voice. It's verse 8. He says, Lord, you shall never wash my feet.

[12 : 21] And it's difficult to convey in English how emphatic this is. Peter is saying, I will have no part of this. You will never, ever wash my feet.

That's what he's saying. And this looks very pious. But it's really false humility. It's hiding either embarrassment or pride.

Maybe both. Embarrassment about how sinful and dirty we know that we are. We think we're beyond help. Or pride that's too self-righteous to admit that we're sinful and we need to be washed.

Well, in either case, Jesus' response to Peter tells us the third thing about the cross. It's that the cross is necessary. He says, Peter, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

He's saying, if I don't wash you, Peter, you'll not have access to the inheritance of eternal life that I'm offering you. If I don't wash you, you won't become a child of God with all the rights and the privileges that comes with it.

[13:34] Here's the point. The cross is a necessary washing.

And if we receive it, this is the last thing. If we receive it by faith, the cross is sufficient to save us.

Again, Peter, his characteristic zealousness. Verse 9. He says, okay, Jesus, if that's what we're talking about, don't just wash my feet, wash all of me.

I want all of me to be clean. I want this inheritance. And Jesus' response in verse 10 makes a third application here.

That it's the, he says that the one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet. For he's completely clean. And you are clean.

[14:51] Jesus is saying that if you have trusted in his death on the cross for salvation, you belong to him. Period.

It's a binary situation. If you believe, you belong to him. I'll never forget when I was probably about seven years old.

I was sitting around with the other seven-year-olds on the bleachers. And we were talking about the ins and outs of the religious life, like you do as a seven-year-old.

And one of my friends sort of went after a friend of mine named James, who had probably done something naughty, and said, that's not very Christian.

And James' response I'll never forget. He said, hey, I'm a real Christian. I've been baptized seven times. And that has stuck with me all these years.

[15:53] But I think what Jesus would say to my friend James is that if you've been washed, you belong to me. You will continue to struggle with sin in the world.

Each of us will touch down on the dirt and the muck of this sinful world. And we will pick up dirt along the way. But Jesus is saying that as that happens, you don't have to be bathed over and over and over again.

You don't start over from zero. All you have to do is return with repentance and faith, trust in what he's done on the cross. And Jesus will continually wash your feet day to day.

So Jesus is teaching us that the cross is a willing sacrifice. It's shocking humility. It's unnecessary washing, and it is sufficient to save us.

That's what the cross is. Okay. So why does he teach us this? Well, of course, it's not so that we would have some abstract religious truth.

[17:08] It's so that we would know how to live as his people in this world. So let's look very quickly at the second half of this passage. What are we supposed to do with this knowledge of the cross that he's teaching us through the foot washing?

It's verses 14 and 15. He says, If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. We're to take all that we've learned from Jesus about how he's loved us on the cross, and we're to serve each other in the same way.

This is what it means for the cross to be the gravitational center of the Christian life. We live as people who are shaped down to our very bones by the love of Jesus on the cross.

And we let that love shape our lives, especially how we serve each other in the church. And I don't have to tell you that this is totally countercultural for us.

[18:22] I've been getting this ad on YouTube for the past probably two months, and I think it really well sums up our culture's view of how we should relate to each other.

It's an ad for a class that you can take to get more power in your life. And I wrote it down. It says, This sounds like a lot of politicians I know.

That's the way of our culture, isn't it? That we just by nature leverage our power over against each other to try to get an advantage.

It's what comes natural to us. Well, Jesus' teaching here is totally different. He says the way to become powerful is to become a servant.

He transforms the whole economy of power. True strength is in weakness. True power is in sacrifice.

[19:32] True honor is in lowly service. And he tells us this is how we're supposed to live as his disciples. And Jesus says it's not enough for us to simply know these things.

Look at verse 17. Blessed are you if you do them. It's not enough just to think that this is right.

You have to live it. You have to put the new economy of power into practice in your life. Serve each other as I have served you, says the Lord.

Because genuine faith always, always works out in service and love towards brothers and sisters in the church. So Jesus is saying, serve each other sacrificially.

And of course, we don't go to the cross for each other. We don't die to atone for sin. But what this does mean is that we do all sorts of things that are inconvenient.

[20:39] That are difficult. That are humbling. Things that you might think are way, way below you. We think of others in the church as more important than ourselves.

And we do whatever we can to serve and build other people up. We're self-forgetful. And we put that into practice.

And remember, it's not so that we would gain salvation. He's already given you that. But it's so that we would be formed in his likeness.

So as we come to 2026, ask the Lord how he's calling you to serve other Christians. Whether that's in our church here at St. John's or otherwise.

There are lots and lots of needs and ways to serve each other sacrificially. So just be open to what opportunities the Lord might be putting in front of you.

[21:39] Because brothers and sisters, we are to follow his example. Let us be humble. Let us serve each other in the church sacrificially.

Let us love each other to the fullest extent possible. And if we do that, our love for each other in the church will build up this congregation.

And it will also preach the gospel to the world. It will shine like a bright shining light into a dark world. And it will draw people to the Lord Jesus.

So St. John's, be served by the Lord so that you can serve others for him. Amen.