

The Greatest Love
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Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:1-17 & 31-35).

1. The Greatest Love

Have you ever experienced the love of another person outside your family? How did you experience that love and who was the person who impacted you most?

When I served in the Korean Army, my church pastor in Seoul wrote me letters regularly for three years. When I read the letters, I felt as though I was Timothy reading one of the letters from Paul. I could tell he genuinely cared for me, and I was uplifted whenever I received his letter.

Last week I found those letters and read them again. One of his daughters joked that he loved me more than his family. The experience of receiving this kind of love had a big impact on my life. It still influences how I serve people in church to this day.

2. Jesus' Love for the Disciples

Today's scripture, John 13, tells us how Jesus loved the disciples. Verse 1 says, "**Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.**"

What does "**he loved them to the end**" mean? "**To the end**" is from the Greek word "*telos*." *Telos* has two meanings: one is "to the fullest degree" and the other is "to the end." Which do you think applies to our passage today? Jesus loved the disciples not only to the fullest extent but also to the end. On Friday, Jesus was crucified, and 24 hours beforehand, he was spending time with the Disciples.

Why do you think Jesus spent his last hours with his disciples instead of his family? John tells us that it is because Jesus loved the disciples so much. Jesus knew how much the disciples would be disappointed and depressed after Jesus left them. They had no idea what to do after Jesus was crucified. If we were the disciples, we would worry about our lives without Jesus. Thursday would be the most difficult time in the lives of the disciples. During the most challenging moment Jesus was with them and showed them how much he loved them.

3. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

How did the disciples experience the greatest love of Jesus? During the meal, Jesus got up and wrapped a towel around his waist and cleaned the feet of the disciples.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter asks, "**Lord, are you going to wash my feet?**" Jesus says, "**you don't really know what I am doing, but later you will understand.**" Peter replies, "**you will never wash my feet.**" Jesus says, "**if I don't wash you, you don't really belong to me.**"

Peter says, “**Lord, wash not only my feet but also my hands and my head.**” Then Jesus says, “**people who have bathed and are clean all over need to wash just their feet.**” After Jesus finished washing the feet of the disciples, he said, “**I have set the example, and you should do for each other exactly what I have done for you.**”

Washing the feet of visitors was a job for slaves. In doing this, Jesus teaches the disciples that Jesus and his followers came to this world not to be served but to serve. Jesus reminds them of why they were called. Reminding the purpose in life to the disciples could be the greatest love for them.

4. The Lord’s Supper

The foot-washing happened when Jesus and the disciples had the Passover meal. Why do you think Jesus had the final meal with the disciples? It is because Jesus teaches them the meaning of the Holy Communion. Matthew 26:26-28 says, “**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”**²⁷ **Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.**²⁸ **This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”**

Why do you think Jesus instituted the Holy Communion? Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the night of the Passover meal. Just as Passover celebrated deliverance from slavery in Egypt, so the Lord’s Supper celebrated deliverance from sin by Jesus’ death.

Jesus takes two traditional parts of the Passover meal, the passing of bread and the drinking of wine, and gives them new meaning as representation of his body and blood. Jesus uses the bread and wine to explain the significance of what he is about to do on the cross.

When we have the Holy Communion, we are reminded of Christ’s death for us and our calling to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. The Holy Communion reminds us that we have received God’s greatest love through Jesus Christ.

5. Love One Another

In verse 34 & 35, Jesus says, “**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**³⁵ **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

Moses says in Leviticus 19:18, “***Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.***” Although to love others is not a new commandment, to love others as Jesus loves us is not easy. Jesus wants us to be living examples of Jesus’ love. The Holy Communion reminds us of our purpose and mission as the followers of Jesus.

6. Conclusion

One day before his crucifixion Jesus spends his time with the disciples reminding them of their purpose in life. The disciples are called to service and share the love of Jesus with others. Reminding the disciples of their purpose in life is Jesus’ greatest love for them and us.

7. Application

We United Methodists say that our mission is to make disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world. Who are the disciples? They do not volunteer to follow Jesus. They are called by Jesus. Do we have a sense of call from Jesus?

Last Sunday we celebrated Palm Sunday. We were so happy to see a parade of ten children and three Sunday School teachers. How many of us have a sense of calling to help the children in our church to experience the greatest love that we have received from Christ? I hope not only Sunday School teachers but all of us have a sense of call to help our children to be the disciples of Jesus Christ.