

Farewell Encounters with Jesus

John 13 – 17



Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet
Unknown

John 13:1-20

Narrator: It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, 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.

Peter: *“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”*

Jesus: *“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

Peter: *“No, you shall never wash my feet.”*

Jesus: *“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”*

Peter: *“Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”*

Jesus: *“A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”*

Narrator: Jesus knew who was going to betray him; that’s why he said not everyone was clean. When he finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

Jesus: *“Do you understand what I have done? 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 an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, 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. I am referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’ I tell you before it happens so that when it happens you will believe that I am He. I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”*

Questions for Reflection:

1. Is it surprising the story of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet is only in John’s Gospel?
2. What is the relationship between the story of Mary anointing Jesus’ feet with costly perfume and Jesus washing the disciples’ feet on what turned out to be the last night of his life?
3. Why do you believe Peter was resistant to Jesus washing his feet?
4. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches by example, whereas in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he teaches with lessons and stories/parables. What is the message he conveys by washing the disciples’ feet?

John 13:21-35

Narrator: After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified,

Jesus: *"I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me."*

Narrator: His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said,

Peter: *"Ask him which one he means."*

Narrator: Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, *"Lord, who is it?"*

Jesus: *"It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."*

Narrator: Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

Jesus: *"What you are about to do, do quickly."*

Narrator: No one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Jesus: *"Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you believe Judas' act of betrayal was predestined and thus out of his control or did he have the power to choose between betrayal of the Lord or not?
2. How is the command to love one another a *"new commandment,"* considering that the Jews already had a "love" commandment: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself."*
3. Biblical commentator Gail O'Day cautions against dismissing the ethical seriousness of Jesus' command to love one another: *"The history of the church and of individual communities of faith suggests that to love one another may be the most difficult thing Jesus could have asked. There are many circumstances in which it is easier to love one's enemies than it is to love those with whom one lives, works, and worships day after day."* Do you agree with Ms. O'Day?

John 13:36 – 14:1-27

Peter: *“Lord, where are you going?”*

Jesus: *“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”*

Peter: *“Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”*

Jesus: *“Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”*

Jesus: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

Thomas: *“Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

Jesus: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

Philip: *“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”*

Jesus: *“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. . . . All this I have spoken while I am still with*

you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. . . .”

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is the issue (i.e. concern) John is addressing by sharing this long intimate conversation Jesus had with his disciples on what turned out to be the last night of his life?
2. The Gospel writer speaks of the Spirit more clearly and at greater length than any other New Testament writer. The Greek word he used was *parakletos* (Paraclete) which means “*called (kletos) alongside (para).*” By sharing this conversation Jesus had with his disciples, John gives us insights into the Paraclete’s/Spirit’s role in our lives. Which of these insights most intrigue you and/or comfort you?

NOTES: Farewell Acts and Conversations (John 13, 14, 15, 16, 17)

1. An unusual feature of John’s Gospel is by the end of chapter 12 the public ministry of Jesus is over. Yet the story of his passion, death, and resurrection does not begin until chapter 18. In chapters 13 thru 17, John tells about the intimate farewell conversations Jesus had with his disciples on the night before his death. In these conversations, Jesus was preparing the disciples for his departure and for life as disciples in his absence. Fred Craddock captures the scene by likening the disciples to children playing on the floor, who happen to look up and see their parents putting on coats. Surprised, they have three questions for their parents: “*Where are you going?*” “*Can we go too?*” “*Who is going to stay with us when you leave?*” These are the concerns John focuses upon in sharing these farewell conversations. However, before addressing the matter of his impending departure, Jesus gathers with his disciples for a final meal – a last supper – where he does something extraordinary that no other gospel writer except John tells us about. Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke who record Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper with his words over bread and wine – “*do this in remembrance of me*” – John excludes this and instead tells us a foot-washing story. It is a story that conveys Jesus’ great love for his disciples as well as instructs them (and us) about the nature of discipleship.

2. There are two aspects of the foot washing to consider: the first is the *receptivity* of the disciples to Jesus’ act of hospitality. Like Judas’ reaction to Mary’s extravagant gesture towards Jesus, Simon Peter expressed embarrassment by Jesus’ act of washing the disciples’ feet. “*You will never wash my feet!*” Peter declared. In Peter’s eyes, Jesus was compromising his dignity. *Freely accepting this gesture of humility and love was difficult for Peter, just as it is for many of us.* There is an intimacy about receiving hospitality that many people find uncomfortable. What Peter and the disciples didn’t understand was that in demeaning himself to wash his disciples’ feet, Jesus was acting out the humiliation of his impending death; a death that draws people into intimate relationship with him by cleansing them of their sins.

The second aspect of the foot washing is Jesus’ command to follow his example and to wash *other peoples’* feet. In the Gospel of John the story of the washing of the disciples’ feet stands in place of the story Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us about the institution of the Lord’s Supper. New Testament scholar, Raymond Brown asks the question: “*Because it is so sacred, the (Lord’s Supper) has been very divisive in Christian history with almost every aspect having been*

fought about. Would Christians have argued with each other so fiercely over the washing of feet? Many Christians vie for the privilege of presiding at the (Lord's Supper). How many would vie for the 'privilege' of washing another person's dirty feet?"

3. John is distinguished from the other Gospels by an almost total lack of ethical exhortations. Nowhere in John are disciples told to turn the other cheek, walk the second mile, forgive those who trespass against you, give away possessions, or attend to the poor. Only in the farewell conversations does a "commandment" appear when Jesus says: *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* That's as close as John gets to issuing an ethical injunction. Mutual love is at the heart of John's vision of the Christian life. The disciples, however, didn't seem interested in the "new commandment" Jesus gave them – they made no comment about it. They were still in shock about Jesus saying he was leaving them.

4. John was addressing the first major crisis of the church: the departure of Jesus. *"Where are you going?" "Can we go too?" "Who is going to stay with us when you leave?"* Jesus assured the disciples they would not be abandoned: *"I will not leave you orphaned."* Jesus said *"another Counselor/Advocate"* would be sent; *the Holy Spirit*, or what John refers to as the *Paraclete*. John speaks more clearly than any other New Testament witness about the *personal presence* or the on-going presence of Jesus; speaking about the Paraclete in five blocks (14:16-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11; and 16:12-15), each providing a different insight into the Paraclete's role in the lives of believers.

- a. The Paraclete/Holy Spirit will be with us forever. The Paraclete/Holy Spirit will not go away.
- b. The Paraclete/Holy Spirit will be a teacher – an Advocate who will continue Jesus' teachings.
- c. The Paraclete/Holy Spirit will be a creative power, keeping believers grounded in the Word but also revealing the mind of Christ in new situations.
- d. The Paraclete/Holy Spirit is not a private possession; it is given and known in the community of faith.
- e. The Paraclete/Holy Spirit accompanies believers as they come into conflict with the world.