



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

John, Part 2

—
JOHN 12–21

LEADERS GUIDE

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 57.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 59**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1^{1/2}-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small

groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Or a congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for John

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide, and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. This older volume is a reliable, comprehensive, confessionally sound commentary by a Lutheran theologian.

Luther, Martin. *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John. Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Vols. 22–24. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957, 1959, 1961.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971. Rated by Dr. Erich Kiehl as perhaps the best commentary on John: "demonstrates a wide and careful knowledge of the total content. Written in a simple style with many valuable excursuses."

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing

House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Westcott, B. F. *The Gospel according to St. John*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950 reprint. An old standard; a helpful resource.

Using Overhead Transparencies

Some lecture leaders like to use the overhead projector. Others find it to be more a hindrance than a help. We recommend that you use an overhead or a chalkboard to show at least the outline of each lecture.

For those who would like to experiment with further use of an overhead projector, use the blacklines in the Appendix of this guide to make overhead transparencies for the lecture in session 1. To make transparencies for use on your overhead projector, simply place the blackline masters on a copy machine and hand-feed plastic transparency sheets, one for each blackline master. (Note that there is one transparency for each one or two sections of the lecture.) The overheads can help the lecture leader stay on track, enhance interest, and still allow for flexibility in the oral presentation.

As your time and interest in this approach permit, follow the same pattern for the lectures in sessions 2 through 9.

Confronting the Enemy

John 12:1–50

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

As Jesus’ ministry moves toward its climax, wonderful things begin to happen—the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany, the triumphant Palm Sunday parade, the voice from heaven, and the belief in Him even among some of the Jewish leaders. But Jesus knows this is the “now time,” the time of anointing for death, the time of the cross, the time to confess Him boldly.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit’s help, will be led to

1. feel the premonitions of death and perceive the plots against His life that Jesus experienced;
2. realize that Jesus willingly and knowingly faced the devil, death, and sin for us;
3. want to worship Jesus from the heart;
4. willingly confess faith in Jesus.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

For the Lecture Leader

You may want to review the manual for the lecture leader distributed in connection with LifeLight training of congregational leaders.

See “Using Overhead Transparencies” in the front of this leaders guide. If you decide to use the blacklines in the Appendix of this guide, you will want to make your transparencies and practice using them before session time.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It’s especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Psalm

Introduce Psalm 118 with the following commentary:

The crowds shouted verses 25–26 of this psalm as Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a King on the donkey. This psalm is one of the Hallel Psalms, a group including Psalms 113–118. *Hallel* means “praise God.” These psalms were part of the memory work of every Jewish boy. The psalms were sung at all the great celebrations in the temple and were an integral part of the Passover seder in the Jewish home. Psalms 113–114 were sung before the meal and Psalms 115–118 after the meal.

A hundred years before Jesus came into Jerusalem, the crowds shouted and sang from this psalm as General Simon Maccabaeus returned from defeating the Syrians. Whenever the Jews sang this psalm, they were thinking of the Messiah, who would one day come as the conqueror, the King.

This is what the crowd had in mind when they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, but they were very disappointed by the end of the week, when Jesus ended up on the cross. Jesus was the Messiah, but He came as the Servant, who laid down His life for those He loved.

If time permits, ask the class to read the psalm responsively from their Bibles, by verses. Divide the class into two groups for the reading, asking those with the NIV to read while the others listen. If more

of the class have the RSV or a different translation, use that group for the reading. Or have copies of the psalm printed to distribute so all will be able to participate.

Prayer

Lead the group in prayer. Thank God for chapter 12 of John and ask for God's blessing on the discussion groups. Pray that, as Mary did a beautiful thing for Jesus, each one of us might find a beautiful thing to do for Him. You may want to assign someone or ask for volunteers to lead the devotion (or at least to have the opening prayer) in the coming weeks.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

As we begin this second LifeLight course on John's Gospel, we feel the atmosphere filled with foreboding. Jesus' enemies had called a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, to discuss how they might counteract the effect of Lazarus's resurrection. Caiaphas, the high priest, had stated (John 11:50): "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." The Sanhedrin had agreed, and (11:53): "from that day on they plotted to take [Jesus'] life."

The Sanhedrin thought *they* were in charge. *They* would select the time to act. *They* would cleverly manipulate events to suit their purposes. *They* didn't realize that behind all of this *God* Himself was confronting and defeating the devil through the death of Jesus Christ. *They* also didn't realize that Jesus was no helpless victim. Jesus was an active participant as He obeyed His Father's plan, which would lead to His death. You and I watch this unfold, but we are not just spectators, for the Son of Man must be "lifted up" *for us* and our salvation!

1 Confronting the Enemy in Jesus' Reaction to His Anointing by Mary of Bethany (12:1–11)

Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, performs an act that is simple, emotional, and beautiful. Even in this act, though, sin injects strife, just as sin often injects strife into the kindest and simplest acts of Christian caregiving.

Bethany was just two miles outside Jerusalem. This event (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9) took place not in Mary's home (where Jesus was often a guest), but in the home of Simon the Leper. Martha (and probably Mary also) was serving. Among those reclining around the table were the 12 disciples, Simon, and Lazarus. Jesus was at the place of honor at the end. The time was probably after sundown (when the Sabbath rest ended) on Saturday evening before Holy Week.

Jesus had dined many times in Bethany, where His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. But this time something extraordinary had happened to charge this occasion with excitement and danger. And Lazarus was right in the middle of it. What later became of him we don't know, for Lazarus disappears from the pages of the Bible after this Saturday, and only God knows the remainder of his life. We know this, however: his life could never be the same again. Lazarus was living proof of the power of Jesus. Wherever he went, people would know.

During the meal, to the surprise of all who were eating, the focus turns to another member of this family. Mary took a bottle of nard, an expensive herb imported from India, and poured its rich perfume over Jesus' feet. She then wiped His feet with her hair. Mary did this as a servant would—just as Jesus Himself would do toward the end of the Passover meal on Maundy Thursday, and she did it with her hair undone, as no self-respecting woman in that day would. Her action expressed complete devotion and service to Jesus, with no thought for herself.

Matthew and Mark tell us that *all* of the disciples complained about Mary's action, while John singles out Judas, perhaps because Judas complained the loudest. John also notes Judas's spiritual deterioration (12:6), since he "did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief," for he had even stolen from the disciples' meager treasury.

Mary didn't use a few drops; she poured out the whole, expensive bottle! Her heart was filled with lavish, "wasteful" thankfulness for what Jesus had done in restoring her dear brother. She might have given the money as an offering in some other way, but to do that on this occasion would have been to lose a beautiful and spontaneous expression of thankfulness while Jesus was still with them in His body. In fact, Jesus pointed

out that Mary had prepared His body for burial! Jesus' comment cautions us about criticizing how someone else has chosen to express thankfulness and devotion. The point is not what a person does, nor how much, but from what and to whom!

When many in nearby Jerusalem heard that Jesus and Lazarus were in Bethany, they came looking for both of them. Undoubtedly they asked the villagers, many of whom had been present at Lazarus's resurrection, about the details of that event. On hearing the story and seeing Lazarus (12:11), many were "going over to Jesus and putting their faith in Him."

The irony is that ordinary people were investigating the miracle and were believing. But their spiritual leaders viewed this miracle, not as a wonderful sign that called for serious investigation, but as a dangerous disturbance requiring suppression and even Jesus' murder! Verse 10—They would add Lazarus to their hit list too. What an insult to almighty God, who alone gives life and the power to raise people from death to life!

So the premonition of death hangs heavily over this beautiful scene at Bethany and over Mary's lavish devotion.

2 Confronting the Enemy in the Palm Sunday Parade (12:12–19)

Passover was near, and many people from throughout the Roman Empire had come to Jerusalem, as the law required, to observe this high and holy festival. The city's streets and alleys were packed. The crowds were excited not only by the festival, but by what they had heard about Jesus of Nazareth. They heard of His preaching concerning the kingdom of God and of how He had performed many signs and miracles.

Hearing that Jesus was entering the city, many waved palm branches and reacted spontaneously with shouts and songs. Then they caught sight of Jesus, riding on a donkey, humbly, yet royally and triumphantly. They shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"

Yet, death hovered near too. Faith sees what God is doing and rejoices. Unbelief sees too—and plots. Verse 19—"See," say the Pharisees to one another, "this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after Him!" What was getting them nowhere was the

decision to wait before acting against Jesus because of the extremely large Passover crowds and the danger of a riot. Now they realized they couldn't wait. They had to kill Him before His followers could react.

3 Confronting the Enemy in Jesus' Announcement of His Death (12:20–36)

"Look how the whole world has gone after Him," the Pharisees said to each other in exasperation. They were more right than they knew! In fact, John tells us that some Greeks came to Philip asking to see Jesus. These Greeks were called "God-fearers," Gentiles attracted to Judaism, some by its belief in one God and some by its moral precepts. However, they may not have been circumcised or have observed the dietary laws of the Hebrew religion.

Although John doesn't say anything more about these Greeks, probably Philip and Andrew found Jesus and brought these seekers to Him. Verses 23–28—But for John the more important recollection is what Jesus said. Frequently Jesus had stated that the right time had not yet come (see John 7:6, 30; 8:20). Now Jesus states: "The hour has come." God's plan was now complete. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." But the "glorification" would come about through His arrest, His humiliation before the soldiers and the mob, and His bloody crucifixion.

Verse 27—Jesus considers being saved from this hour. But He immediately rejects this "saving." He had not come to save Himself but the world lost in sin. Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane (which John does not include in his Gospel) expresses this same line of thought when the Savior prays (Matthew 26:39): "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will." And the writer to the Hebrews describes in part this time of trial for Jesus (Hebrews 12:2): "For the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross, scorning its shame." Verse 28—The "joy set before Him" was that Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection would glorify the Father's name. Verse 31—It was also the joy of knowing that the time for judging this fallen world and driving out its "prince," the devil, was now drawing near. Verse 32—The joy of Jesus also included us—for, in the lifting up of Jesus on the cross, we and all believers would be drawn to Him.

The “glory” of the Son of Man is described in picture language as a seed. The purpose of a seed is to produce more seeds. That can only be done when it is planted in the ground and “dies.” Out of that death comes abundant life. That picture describes the purpose of Jesus’ death—to produce in abundance the “seeds” of believers in His name.

Jesus’ words about the seed falling into the ground, dying, and coming out again ought to have a familiar ring to us. We’ve heard those words before accompanied by the sound of splashing water! About Baptism Paul writes (Romans 6:4): “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Dying and rising—a seed dies and yet produces new life. In Christ we die in Holy Baptism—and miraculously live again!

“We would like to see Jesus,” the Greeks who seek Jesus say. Jesus replies, “I am going to die!” You want to see Jesus? Then die to selfishness, to the agenda the world writes for you, to your plans that don’t begin and end in God, and then you’ll see Jesus, for He says, “Where I am, My servant also will be.”

Verses 27–28—The Father will glorify His name through the work of His Son for us. Verse 30—Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not Mine.” And now you see Jesus, for now you can hear Him speaking to your own forgiven heart.

4 Confronting the Enemy in Jesus’ Call to Confess One’s Faith Openly (12:37–50)

Many of the people were confused about Jesus. Others chose not to believe. John wrote of them (12:37): “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him.” John then added the words of prophecy from Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10. It is ironic that John writes that Isaiah, who saw Jesus only from the dim distance of centuries (12:41), “saw Jesus’ glory and spoke of Him,” while the spiritual leaders of the people, who saw and heard Jesus up close, refused to believe.

Verse 43—Besides those who were confused or who refused to believe, there were those who wanted to believe but then backed away because “they loved

praise from men more than praise from God.” Fence-straddlers in large numbers are also present among us today. Claiming to be Christian is fine for them as long as that claim doesn’t cost anything. And when it does, they leave. It may be because the preacher steps on their sins or because someone has the audacity to ask for their time, talent, and treasure as responses to God’s love. Perhaps someone doesn’t pay enough attention to them. Verse 42—The bottom line, though, is that they will not “confess their faith” through their lives, for “they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”

Many among the Jews apparently felt they could reject Jesus and His claim yet still claim God. They separated Jesus from God, placing Jesus into a “good prophet” category—someone with interesting opinions about God and life. But they ignored the other claims that had to be dealt with if they were to respond honestly to Jesus. People do that with Jesus today. They shop for the church that best meets their own self-centered needs, while ignoring the doctrine of the Gospel in their shopping. They treat the Christian faith like a smorgasbord, picking and choosing what appeals to their individual tastes.

Verses 44–50—But Jesus spoke in either-or categories of light and darkness. To see Jesus is also to see the Father! To believe in Jesus is also to believe in the Father. And not to believe in Jesus is also not to believe in the Father. Jesus was announcing the division that now would unfold between His followers and those who refused Him, including unbelieving Jews. Jesus was about to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. And, as the apostle Peter would soon proclaim (Acts 4:12), “Salvation is found in none else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Conclusion

That is what this chapter is about—confronting the spiritual darkness with no halfway, halfhearted measures. Instead, the premonitions of a battle to the death. Like the army commander who signals the beginning of a great battle with only the one word *Now!* Jesus signals beforehand what is going to happen (John 12:31): “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” Now! Now the

world's way (which says this time, this life, these earthly goods are all there is) is condemned! Now! Now the ruler of evil, the author of sickness and sorrow, of bloodshed and war will be driven out and shall be completely conquered at the end of time! Where is this to happen? At the cross!

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Concluding Activities

Close this first session by thanking God for the blessings He has already given LifeLight participants through their study this past week. Ask God's blessing also on the study that will take place during the coming week. Make any necessary announcements. Distribute the enrichment magazine and encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 2.

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Notes

Getting Our Bearings

John 13:1–14:14

Preparing for the Session

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Central Focus

Each today and each tomorrow depend on knowing where we've been and where we must go as God's people. Jesus knew that, and this led Him to be a servant to Judas, Peter, and the frightened disciples.

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Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. understand and appreciate the powerful basis for servanthood;
 2. appreciate and feel the compassion of Jesus for Judas;
 3. understand and desire true "glory";
 4. yearn to know Jesus and to be with Him.
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Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 62.

Session Plan

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Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index), or on the *Every Voice a Song* CD set.

Psalm

Read Psalm 41 responsively by verses, as in the last lesson. The group could be divided into men and women or down the middle of the room.

Jesus in our lesson this week quoted verse 9 of this psalm when He referred to Judas, who was planning

to betray Him. Psalms 38–41, written by David, come from a time in his life when he was suffering from a serious illness, which he saw as God's rebuke for some sin he had committed. His suffering is aggravated by the withdrawal of friends (38:11) and the efforts of enemies to take advantage of him (38:12, 16, 19–20).

David laments that even a close friend, someone who shared the bread of his own table, betrayed him (41:9). As David was inspired to write this psalm, God enabled him to look ahead and to find comfort in the life of his Savior, who also would be betrayed by a friend, one who shared the fellowship of His table. And, unlike David, this Savior had no sins of His own that deserved God's rebuke. Instead, this Savior would bear the punishment for David's own sins and for ours!

Prayer

Ask for special prayer requests and include them in the prayer. Pray especially that God would help us to learn to serve others as humbly as Jesus did.

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Lecture Presentation

Introduction

"Getting Our Bearings"—that's the title of this section, 13:1–14:14. The title could just as well be given to all of John 13–18. For that's what this entire section is about—finding our way through the maze of darkness, confusion, and ignorance that characterizes life in this fallen world.

The bearings we are given are both obvious and surprising. They are obvious if, as followers of Jesus Christ, we understand our past and our future. They are surprising—even extremely disconcerting—if we have forgotten our origin and our destiny or have become distracted from them. So this section gets personal. Jesus gets very personal with His disciples. He gets very personal with us, too, as LifeLight students of John 13:1–14:14 and as spiritual participants in these Maundy Thursday events. We are asked to do some soul-searching as we seek to "get our bearings."

1 Getting Our Bearings: It Has to Do with Foot Washing (13:1–17)

John provides the bearings for what he is about to write. First, what is to unfold occurred on a specific, important night: the night we know as Maundy Thursday. Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning a “mandate” or a “command.” This is based on verse 34: “A new command I give you: Love one another.”

This would be Jesus’ last supper with His followers before His crucifixion. What was about to happen was no mystery to Jesus. The events that were to unfold (13:1) did not take Him by surprise as if He were a helpless, hapless victim. Instead, John writes, “Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father.” His mission was about to come to its climax, and Jesus knew it!

What would be our state of mind if we knew we were about to be arrested by a tyrannical government, tried before a kangaroo court, charged falsely with crimes by scoundrels, and then put to death in a most shameful and public manner? My guess is we would spend our last moments of freedom in panic, watching out for our own interests and hoping others would come to our rescue.

With Jesus it is absolutely different! Jesus gathered with His loved ones, His disciples. He did it in the peace of the Upper Room and in the context of a religious event (Exodus 12:13), the Passover meal, which commemorated the rescue of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Jesus considered this His last opportunity to serve His disciples by caring for their needs, not His own. He wanted them to get their bearings as He showed them (v. 1) “the full extent of His love,” a love they would see in its full implications the next day on the cross.

Luke writes that Jesus sent Peter and John into the village to (Luke 22:8) “make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” They secured the room, purchased the lamb and the other things needed for the Passover meal, and, perhaps with the aid of some of the women who also followed Jesus, prepared the meal.

Ordinarily, when guests reclined at the low table for such an occasion, a servant would go around behind the dinner guests and wash their feet. At this meal, however, there was no slave, and none of the disciples

wanted that menial task. The person who humbled himself and went around the circle of reclining bodies and washed their feet would be the lowest one there. Each of the disciples would have none of that!

The disciples obviously had a different view of Jesus’ ministry, His purpose, and their part in it. This is clear in Matthew 20:20–28, when the mother of James and John tried to promote her sons, asking that one should sit on Jesus’ right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom. They obviously thought the kingdom would consist of Jesus’ exercise of power on this earth and that they would wield power alongside Jesus. When the other disciples got wind of her request, they were indignant—not because James and John had asked for the wrong thing, but because they had asked first! The world understands power, and, since we live in this world of petty power, we usually buy into the same things.

Then someone did move. What moved Him is what moves Christlike servants who follow Him. Note 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.” What do you do when you have all that power, when you know absolutely where you have come from and where you’re going? The world responds by saying that that person has his or her act together and can get about anything he or she wants. But what a distortion of life!

Only one in that room of self-centered, self-serving people had the power and the self-knowledge to act. It was Jesus. Jesus, knowing He had all power and knowing where He had come from and where He was going (from God and to God) (13:4–5), “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.”

This entire section has to do with getting one’s bearings. The disciples didn’t have their bearings. They were still jockeying for position, and they assumed that that’s what life is all about! If the truth were told, don’t we do the same thing? Husbands and wives, parents and children, people on the job and at play all join the competitive game with each other—and act as though that’s the way things not only are but ought to be! There’s no

place there for a foot washer! So we go our own self-asserting way, ruining our relationships even within our marriages, families, and churches! And why? Because we have forgotten where the power is. It is found in the forgiveness of sins. It is found at the foot of the cross. And we've forgotten where we've come from and where we're going. We have come from God through His naming of us as His own in Holy Baptism, and we are going to God at the end of our lives. When you know that, you are empowered and courageous enough to forget self, pour water into a basin, and wash feet!

Simon Peter's response is interesting. Peter often seems to take a leading role among the disciples. But he always considered Jesus his superior. Jesus was his Master. So Peter was taken by surprise when Jesus came to him and began to wash his feet!

The world has always been taken by surprise and even repulsed by the thought of God becoming one of us. "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom," Paul would write about the incarnate Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:22–23), "but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." It is only when we realize how low God had to come because of the lowliness, commonness, and depth of our sin and need that we realize how deep the love of God is and had to be!

This is why Jesus responded to Peter with the words (13:7): "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Indeed, Jesus would point to a future time of understanding several times later that evening (14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 15). He was referring to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and to the knowledge and understanding that would then be theirs.

Peter objected vehemently to Jesus washing his feet. But Peter did not comprehend what Jesus was actually telling the disciples. The foot washing exemplified how the disciples were to serve one another, but it also revealed something about Jesus that was far more important. This action of Jesus had consequences from out of the past and into the future that would unfold the next day, Good Friday. Jesus is the Servant foretold in the great servant chapter of Isaiah 53. Surely Jesus had this passage from Isaiah in mind and wanted to convey it to His disciples: The Servant is in your midst,

and He is on His way to the fulfillment of the servant song in Isaiah 53!

"Not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" is Peter's response when Jesus insists that He must wash his feet—not just for the sake of Peter's feet, but for the sake of Peter's place in God's kingdom. Jesus comments that guests at a feast bathe before they arrive. Once at the feast, only the feet need washing. Jesus was saying that the disciples were already in God's kingdom—the feast. They had already been cleansed—forgiven and purified from sin through faith in Jesus. Now they needed to learn to serve one another in humility and love, just as Jesus was now humbly serving them.

Now the food could be served, and they began to eat. But before they could forget what had happened, Jesus taught them and ended the lesson with a beatitude (13:17): "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Blessed is the servant who is still "washing feet"!

There is no evidence in the New Testament that foot washing became a part of churchly practice. In fact, it is not mentioned again. The example Jesus gave was simply that: an example of how Christians are to live in this world of power and position. Foot washing became the "tap on the shoulder" that spoke to the Christian and said (Luke 22:27): "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves." To persecuted Christians Peter would later write (1 Peter 2:21): "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." And, lest we forget our calling to be foot washers, Paul reminds us most clearly (Philippians 2:5–8): "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

To this very difficult command is given the promise of blessing (13:17): "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." The blessing is given to those who heed the gentle tap on the shoulder and realize the One who is tapping is Jesus Himself. He not

only reminds us to be foot washers; He also gives us the power to take towel, basin, and water and proceed to wash feet. That's what He means when He says (13:8), "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." Once we are washed in the daily renewal of our Holy Baptism, we are equipped with what we need: the towel, basin, water, and the spirit of Servant Jesus.

2 Getting Our Bearings: It Has to Do with the Word of God (13:18–30)

At this point, almost like a terrible dream that suddenly becomes real, Jesus thinks of Judas and reaches out to him with the words (13:18): "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen." Judas, He knows, will betray his master. Then Jesus says something curious, perhaps even hard to understand. He states that Judas's betrayal had been prophesied in a Scripture that is about to be fulfilled. Then He quotes from Psalm 41:9, which says, "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." This psalm by King David may have referred to a time when he was ill and someone in the palace who actually ate with him was plotting against him. Jesus quotes this psalm verse to show that He experienced all the rejection, betrayal, and suffering that others, including David, experienced. In fact, Jesus experienced far more as He bore the sin and pain of the whole world for our sake, fulfilling this and every prophecy.

Even more important is the seeming inevitability of the betrayal. Judas by his act would fulfill Scripture. It had to happen, and yet it didn't have to happen. Jesus declared in Matthew's Gospel (26:24): "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." What was about to happen would happen, but that did not relieve Judas of personal responsibility.

People have tried to understand this remarkable fact, especially as it focuses on the person of Judas. Was Judas a helpless puppet in the hand of God? If Judas had refused to succumb to temptation, how would God have carried out our salvation? Although we can't enter the mind of God to answer difficult questions such as these, we can be certain Jesus placed complete responsibility on Judas. Judas had been with Jesus for three

years; he had heard and seen the wonder of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus, and he certainly could have gone to Jesus for help in his temptations. But he did not.

Yet the betrayal of Jesus was in God's plan, and it had already been set in Scripture. It was from Scripture that Jesus got His "bearings" in this difficult time. The Word of God is that to which we, like our Savior, can turn, especially in the rough and stormy times of life.

During the Passover meal the participants used the unleavened bread for scooping or dipping from common bowls the other foods eaten in the meal. Jesus took a piece of this bread, dipped it into one of the dishes, and gave it to Judas with the somber command (v. 27), "What you are about to do, do quickly." Thinking that Judas was merely leaving to buy more food, the disciples didn't take notice of his exit. John closes this section (v. 30): "And it was night." Indeed! The forces of darkness were now arrayed against the light of God!

3 Getting Our Bearings: It Has to Do with Understanding "Glory" (13:31–38)

Now Jesus declared, seemingly almost in relief (v. 31): "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him." His glory was beginning with His deep humiliation, because that's the way God does things! The writer to the Hebrews explains it this way (Hebrews 12:2): "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame." The "joy" set before Jesus was saving us! He endured the cross and the shame, even found His "glory" in them, because He saw us and our salvation. The writer to the Hebrews continues in verse 3: "Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." We also can find our "glory" in life's difficult trials when we have our "bearings" fixed on Christ.

When Jesus announced (v. 33) that He would be with them for only a little while longer and then would be gone, the disciples heard only their own confusion and fear. They didn't hear His other words (or at least they didn't respond at all to them) (v. 34): "A new command I give you: Love one another."

The “new command” is that they are to love (v. 34) “as I have loved you.” This “as” is linked to the glorification in verses 31–32 and to the place where Jesus is going (vv. 33, 36–37). We are to love one another in the same way and in the same degree that Jesus loves us—all the way to the cross! That, of course, is impossible, unless we grow into Christ—which is the subject of the next several chapters of John’s Gospel.

4 Getting Our Bearings: It Has to Do with Where Jesus Was Going (14:1–14)

The words of this section are possibly the most comforting in all of Scripture. Many people who have lost a loved one in death have turned to these words—and no wonder! To Thomas’s questions of “where,” Jesus responds with those words of complete certainty for all who believe (v. 6): “I am the way and the truth and the life.” There is no other way, no greater truth, and no other life. All are found in Jesus, and in Jesus is found the Father in heaven. Those who believe this, Jesus indicates in verses 9–14, have all the blessings of the Father and will experience an abundant life beyond all human understanding or predictability.

But first you “get your bearings” by following the foot washer, the Word, the glorious Son, the one who takes you to be where He is—Jesus Christ, your Savior!

Concluding Activities

Ask participants to think of someone whose “feet” they might “wash”—someone for whom they might give some special service that is needed, even a service that requires humility. Then speak a prayer asking Jesus for His help and encouragement that these “feet” might be “washed” and that the “foot washers” might be blessed by it.

Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.

Point out that the enrichment magazine provides additional interesting reading to accompany their daily study.

Notes

