

## What Does Love Look Like?

John 13, Philippians 2:1-11

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For a moment, think of a person who loves you.

Then answer this question:

How do I *know* that person really loves me?

When our boys were youngsters we had a bedtime ritual. After they had their pjs on and their teeth brushed, we would read aloud to them. After story time they would head to their respective rooms. At their bedsides, Rob and I would sing a song, say a brief prayer, and then good-night. As usual one evening I said to our youngest: "I love you."

"I know!" was his exasperated response. "*I know!* So why do you always tell me?"

I don't remember my response that night, but what I wanted to say to him was this: "I tell you every day because it is true. I DO love you. I tell you every day because we need to hear those words. But I also know that words alone are not enough. When I help you with your homework, take you to ball practice and show up at your band concerts, it is because I love you. When I teach you how to make macaroni and cheese, or how to ride a bike, it is because I love you."

I had a significant other in my life who would say: "I love you with all my heart." That's good, right? But words alone are not enough. This person was all talk and no action.

Conversely, action without words may not be enough.

The father of a friend of mine, died recently. While sharing some memories with me, she said: "My dad was not a warm, affectionate person. He was a scientist, very pragmatic. He never hugged me or told me he loved me. He provided for our family and he made sure my sister and I went to college. I think that was how he expressed his love for us." She said this rather wistfully. To fully grasp love's reality we need both words and actions together.

The setting for this passage of scripture? Jerusalem. Previously, the disciples had begged Jesus *not* to go to Jerusalem. Tensions were running high. There were threats against Jesus' life. The religious authorities had Jesus in their sights. Death was imminent.

Passover is near. They gather together in the upper room. As Jesus enters the room, what might he have been thinking? What was his frame of mind?

John tells us that Jesus was very self-aware...Jesus knew both his origin and his destination: that he had come from the Father and that he would soon be returning to the Father.

Jesus knew that the Father had given him power, authority. And weighing heavily on his mind, Jesus knew that one of his beloved disciples would betray him, and he knew that his earthly life was coming to a close. His time was limited.

I spoke recently with a friend who has cancer. The hope is to get into a clinical trial to extend his life. What struck me as I listened to him share, was the sense of urgency about making every moment count; a desire to live to the fullest in this present moment!

Suppose you were told you have 48 hours remaining before your death. I can imagine such news would throw one's priorities into sharp relief: some things on my "to do" list would immediately become irrelevant. Other things would rapidly move to the top of the list!

What would you absolutely want to do in your remaining time?  
Jesus knew he had only hours remaining, time was of the essence. Now was the time to demonstrate his LOVE to his disciples.

Jesus is secure in his identity. His self-esteem is not defined by or threatened by human categories or labels. He defies expectations when, of all things, he takes on this role of a slave/servant. In fact, by doing so, Jesus is acting out a parable. Jesus is giving us an example (v.15), a pattern for living, a pattern for loving.

What does he do?

"Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." (13:1)

If you want to show someone how much you love them, what will you do? Depends on the person? Gary Chapman wrote a book called "Five Languages of Love: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to your Mate" (1995). Since then other versions have been published for parents/children, etc.

What are the five love languages? Quality time, gift giving, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch.

In this instance, *Jesus expresses love through an act of service.*

Foot washing is **not** a common practice today. Not only was it a common practice in the ancient middle east, it was *a necessity*. Think about it: if people wore shoes at all they were simple sandals. Most were barefoot. The dirt roads were dusty when dry, muddy when damp, and without modern sewer systems, the roads were the receptacles of both human and animal waste. It is not hard then to imagine why it was necessary—not just a nice custom, but a necessity—to provide a basin and towel at the entrance to every home.

In a situation such as this, where guests come together in expectation of a meal, they likely would bathe at home before coming. However, their feet would surely become soiled on the way. Customarily a slave would be stationed at the door, along with the basin and towel, to do the job.

However on this occasion, the towel and basin await. The guys are already finding their places around the table.

Another detail we often forget is that then, it was customary for people to recline at table. If I am stretched on my side, my feet might well be uncomfortably near the face of the next person in line around the table! *Not very appetizing!!*

Jesus seizes this opportunity to show them and us, what love looks like: He removes his outer garment, wraps the towel around his waist, and begins to wash his way around the room. I imagine that as he does so, voices fall silent. It is an uncomfortable silence. What does Jesus think he is doing? This is so *not* what they expect of a King!

When Jesus comes to Peter (Dear Peter!), he says aloud what the others are probably thinking: "What do you think you're doing? No way are **you** Jesus, going to wash **my** feet!" (No, it's **not** your job. Besides, it is too intimate! It is too uncomfortable! Stop...don't!!)

But Jesus replies: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

Then in typical “all-or-nothing-fashion”, Peter replied, “Then Lord, 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. (A not so veiled reference to Judas.) (John 13:8-11)

At least two things are going on here. First, Jesus has by his very actions, including the change of clothing, taken on the very nature of a servant. Paul writes about this in Philippians 2.

Jesus, <sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature<sup>[a]</sup> God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
<sup>7</sup>rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature<sup>[b]</sup> of a servant, being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

In this act of washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus demonstrates his choice to serve and love—in selfless humility.

It is as if Jesus were saying: “Peter, if you do not let me be who I am, if you do not let me stoop down and act on your behalf to cleanse you, you will not be able to enter the Kingdom. Peter, something needs to be done for you, and unless I do it, you have no part with me”.

Secondly, this is a reality check—as distasteful as the idea may seem to us, our lives are soiled by sin and we cannot cleanse ourselves. We need a Savior to deal with it once and for all. Christ does this on the cross. Only the ultimate act of love and service, only the ultimate “stooping down” can make us completely clean. The cross of Christ provides the ultimate cleansing which then allows us to stand in the presence of a Holy God, and enter into God’s Kingdom.

Jesus does his best to accommodate the disciples' ability to understand what is happening—to give explanations. But he notes that some things shall become clear to them only in retrospect, when they look back, the pieces of the puzzle will fall into place. They will completely comprehend these events, only in the fullness of time.

Jesus uses not only words, but actions to demonstrate what love looks like, and it does not look like anything we would expect!

What is the worst job you can think of? Is there something that you absolutely refuse to do?

When it came to a division of household tasks, Rob and I shared an equal distaste for cleaning the bathroom. So we decided it was only fair to take turns! I had a friend who once worked for a company that cleaned septic tanks. It paid his bills, but as soon as reasonably possible, he moved on to something else!

Some people will say: I don't do diapers. I don't do whatever...

*Jesus says: "...you also should wash one another's feet".*

Did he mean that literally? I think not. We wear shoes and have paved roads and sidewalks. The idea of foot washing does not easily translate from Jesus' time and culture into ours.

If we are to follow Jesus' example, and live the way that Jesus is calling us to, we better figure out how to serve others. It just might be a call to do the most menial of tasks. It might be to do something we think is "beneath us". Where would we be if Jesus had said: "I don't do feet!" or "I don't do crosses! I love 'em, but *not THAT much!!*"

Jesus would challenge us by asking us:

How low can you go, to serve me?

How low can you go, to serve the "least of these"? Because the least of these—the hungry, the thirsty, the poor, the prisoner, the orphan and widow—these are the ones we are called to serve—as if they are Jesus Christ himself!

Theologian and pastor, Lesslie Newbiggin sheds light on this truth when he wrote:

"Jesus has laid aside his life for us all, and the debt which we owe to him is to be discharged by our subjection [humble submission] to our neighbors in

loving service. Our neighbor is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe the Master." (read twice)

On the cross Jesus paid our debt, to redeem our lives from sin. We are forever in Jesus' debt and cannot repay him. However, we express our love and gratitude to Jesus for this gift, by serving others in Jesus' name.

During 2016, Dianna and Denise were so helpful to us and God used them in a significant way during our season of Discovery. One of the outcomes of that year was the naming of Calvary's charism, or corporate spiritual gift: "A legacy of worship and service."

As we have celebrated over the last twelve months, we have remembered God's faithfulness, we have recalled God's faithful servants—pastors and members—who have been instrumental in impacting the Plateau for Christ. Plateau Outreach Ministries, services to youth and seniors, food banks and juvenile justice initiatives along with global missions have been celebrated. Many activities throughout the year have highlighted these past and ongoing ministries.

How faithful God is--One hundred twenty-six years and counting!

Having looked back, it is time now to look forward:  
What is God calling Calvary to do in the next chapter of our life together?

Our charism remains the same: Worship and Service!

But the world—our community—and yes, even we ourselves are changing!  
What does it mean to be those who worship and serve in Enumclaw on the plateau, today, in 2019, and beyond?

"How low can we go" to serve the least of these ? What are the greatest needs? With our unique mix of ages, abilities, and spiritual gifts, what might God be calling us to do as we move into the future?

The needs are immense. We cannot solve every problem or meet every need. However, our God is great! May God show us how to do small things with great love, as Mother Teresa has said.

Please join the elders, Pastor Cindy and me as we pray and seek God's guidance for the next exciting chapter in the life of Calvary Presbyterian Church. To God be the Glory! Great things God has done, and yet God will do, in us and through us. Halleluia, Amen!

Let us pray.