

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Week 6: John 13: 1-17, 34-35 - Jesus: The Loving Servant

CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of John from previous weeks. What kind of literature is the gospel of John? Who wrote it? What is the book's main purpose? How is the book organized? Where are we in the large story of Scripture? What stories or images do you remember most from the first 5 weeks? What did you carry with you from last week's study about the blind man who was healed? Are there other pieces of your life that are connecting to this study?

Today's Passage: Today, we encounter one of the most tender-hearted and intimate moments in Jesus' ministry as he provides a lesson on love in a totally unexpected way. John is the only gospel writer who includes this story of feet and of love in connection with the last supper. This passage marks the beginning of Section 3 in John (remember the 5 sections from week 1?), which focuses on Jesus' last moments and words to his disciples. After Jesus completes his final miraculous sign by raising his beloved friend Lazarus from the dead (John 11), and before His own crucifixion and death (John 18-19), Jesus prepares His followers to carry on His ministry. These chapters are some of the most beloved in all of Scripture, and are punctuated- over and over again- with the word "love"...

CONTENT:

Read John 13: 1-17, 34-35 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. According to John, what does Jesus know about himself (vs 1-3)?
2. In light of that knowledge, what is remarkable about what Jesus does in vs 4-5?
3. There are many times in the gospels where Jesus teaches about a concept through words, stories, parables. Why do you think Jesus actually washes his disciple's feet here instead of simply speaking/teaching about love?
4. Is Peter being humble when he refuses to let Jesus wash his feet? Arrogant? Something else?
5. What spiritual truth is Jesus trying to communicate with Peter (and all his followers) in vs 8-11?
6. After he is done washing, how does Jesus explain his actions to his followers (vs 12-17)?
7. In Chapter 1, we were given 7 different "titles" for Jesus. What are the two that are repeated here in verse 13? What additional title does Jesus seem to want his followers to understand based on his act of love? How do these all go together?
8. In verse 34-35, Jesus establishes the new norm for the community of faith, which will become the Church. What is that new norm? What will it accomplish?

APPLICATION:

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion.

- Have you ever been part of or observed a foot washing of any kind? If so, share about your experience. If not, what do you imagine about that act? How does it make you feel to think about washing someone's feet? What about having your own feet washed?
- How easy/difficult/somewhere in between is it for you to be served by someone else- to receive care from someone else? Is there a difference between someone you know well or someone who is more distant from you?
- Talk about the differences (if there are ones) or similarities between love as an *emotion* or love as an *action*. How is love presented in this passage?
- What does this passage teach you about the character of God? Is this a "posture" of God that feels familiar to you? Hard? Beautiful? Complicated?
- In verses 34-35, Jesus in essence establishes the character of the people of God- identified today as the church- in one word: LOVE. He says that the main way that people will know who you are, what you are about, and *whose* you are, is through the way you love each other (a "foot-washing" kind of love that involves lowering yourself, attending tenderly to each other, giving up your own desire for esteem, etc).
- Have the faith communities you have seen or been part of been places where you have witnessed this kind of love? Places where this kind of love has seemed distant? In what ways?
- What about here at Calvin? Would you say we are a faith community distinguished by love? Should we be?
- By yourself or as a group, ask the Spirit to reveal someone in your very real life who perhaps needs a "foot-washing" kind of love act. Think about ways you might be able to love and serve that person this week.





PRAYER:

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below.

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer from *Knowing Jesus*:

Loving God-

As you have loved us, teach us how to love.

Not just in words, not just in ideas,

but on our knees, with bucket and towel in hand.

And through our meager attempts at love,

may the world know we are your disciples.

May the world know you. Our beautiful Servant King.

We pray this in the name of Christ, the One who truly loves us to the end...

Amen

