

Jesus in the Gospel of John

“The Discourses of Jesus”

[John 15:9-17](#)

The Gospel of John includes a number of discourses that do not appear in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And, most of these discourses are quite lengthy. For example, the discourse on Jesus being the bread of life takes up about half of chapter 6; we find a similar length discourse after the healing of a man with a chronic condition in chapter 5. The discourse on how Jesus is the good shepherd takes up almost all of chapter 10. But, in terms of length, the longest discourse is the *Farewell Discourse* that Jesus gives to his disciples at John’s version of the Last Supper. It is spread out across 5 chapters, beginning in Chapter 13 and concluding with a prayer in Chapter 17.

I invite you now to turn to chapter 13 in the Gospel of John in your own Bibles or the pew Bible in front of you or even on the Bible app on your phone and follow along as we examine the Farewell Discourse together.

We find in chapter 13 the inspiration for a ritual that is often observed across denominations on Maundy Thursday. Jesus’ washing of the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper is unique to John’s Gospel. During the meal, Jesus gets on his knees and begins to wash the disciples’ feet. Can you imagine their shock? This was their master, the One whom they recognized as their Messiah, the King who was to save the people of Israel, doing a job that was usually reserved for household servants. And this is why Peter, the ever honorable one, says to Jesus, “No!, You will never wash my feet!”

Now, why would Jesus do such a shocking gesture, one that even his closest disciples could not understand? In order for us to see the whole picture, we need the context of what was happening during the Last Supper, something the Gospel of Luke provides us in chapter 22, verses 24-26:

An argument broke out among the disciples over which one of them should be regarded as the greatest. But, Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called ‘friends of the people.’ But, that’s not the way it will be with you. Instead, the greatest among you must become like a person of lower status and the leader like a servant.”

In the act of washing their feet, Jesus showed the disciples, who were busy bickering about their respective ranking in the group, what it truly meant to be one of his followers. After he had washed everyone’s feet, Jesus said to them: *“If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do.”*

In this way, Jesus illustrates just prior to his death a fundamental principle of our Christian faith. If you want to be a truly Christian, a follower of Jesus, then, we must do not only as he commanded but did by way of example -- we must serve others. And these don’t have to be grand, big gestures. We can start small, even around our church community. Whether it is setting up for or cleaning up after the Coffee Hour or picking up litter around the church campus, no act is insignificant. When our hearts are open to serve others, more opportunities to serve those in our midst and in the greater community will appear before our

very eyes. Come see me if you are wondering how you might be able to serve around here. I will be more than happy to help you!

Let's turn to chapter 14; I will read the first 3 verses from the Common English Bible:
Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me, so that where I am, you will be too.

These words of assurance which Jesus gave to his disciples, while anticipating his own death, speaks to us as well. They offer comfort when we lose our loved ones. That's why this passage is often read at funerals and memorial services.

When you hear Jesus talk about "a place" that he prepares for you, you might be imagining a physical space. But, the Greek word for "house" that is used here was "oikos," meaning "family." In the ancient world, a family included multiple generations, not just the nuclear family - grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren -- they all lived together, sharing a life together under one household. That's the image of heaven that Jesus provides us in his Farewell Discourse -- heaven is like one big family, a home where all are connected and share life together in eternity.

And "being connected" is a prominent theme that we find throughout the Farewell Discourse. In chapter 14, verse 20, Jesus says, "*On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you.*" In chapter 15, he further develops this theme with the metaphor of the vine and its branches, which we examined last week. Jesus says in verse 5, "I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything."

Here is a prayer of someone who remained connected to Jesus, the vine. It's a prayer of St. Patrick whose day our nation celebrated yesterday:

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.

Then, how do we remain connected to Jesus Christ, so that we might bear much fruit? We remain connected to him through our spiritual disciplines.

We pray. We fast. We read and study the Bible. We worship. We praise. We come together for fellowship and discipleship. And we give, and we serve.

At the same time, no matter how earnest we are in our efforts to stay connected to Christ through our spiritual disciplines, we must remember that our efforts are always a response to the work of the Holy Spirit that goes before us. In chapter 14, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit God will send to the disciples in

his name. Jesus assures his disciples that they will never be left alone. And this, too, is our inheritance. The Holy Spirit comes alongside *us* and walks with *us*. The Holy Spirit helps *us* to trust in Christ and draws *us* close to Christ, enabling *us* to recover our Christ-likeness. The Holy Spirit comforts *us* and advocates on our behalf.

The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God at work in the lives of Jesus' followers. So, invite the Holy Spirit to be with you and work within you. Watch for the Holy Spirit who is working through the various people God has surrounded next to you. For the work of the Holy Spirit is active in the world around us. We will learn more about the work of the Holy Spirit during the season of Pentecost later this year.

Finally, throughout the Farewell Discourse, Jesus repeatedly asks his disciples to bear fruit by keeping his commandments. What are his commandments? Jesus announces, in chapter 13, verse 34, *"I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other."* This is echoed in chapter 15, verse 12, *"This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you."*

What does it look like to be a mature Christian, a devoted follower of Jesus? Well, according to Jesus, Christian maturity is measured by the love a person has towards others. The paradigm of love that Jesus leaves us with in these chapters of the Gospel of John is embodied through his own actions. *He takes time to slow down and wash his disciples' feet even as he is preparing to lay down his life for us.*

Brothers and Sisters, maturing in faith, bearing fruit of faith is not about how much biblical knowledge you have, it is not about how eloquently you can pray, it is not about how deep your theological understanding is, or about how much money you give. Yes, they are all important; however, they are not essential. For if you do not practice love, you miss the mark, and your faith is in vain. If we are to bear the fruit of faith, we will be connected to the vine of Jesus Christ, who not only tells us, but shows us what it means to love others. As it is written in 1 John chapter 3, verse 18, *"let us not love with words or speech but with action and truth."*

Truly, love is not just a feeling but an action. Someone said, love is not a noun but a verb. Love is expressed in many different ways, both small and big. It can be as small as greeting a stranger with a smile or allowing a car to merge into your lane (maybe, this is big for some of us) or as big as taking a day off to be with someone who is having surgery or taking care of your neighbor's dog when they are out of town.

Love casts out fear and accepts others as they are, where they are. Love breaks down barriers and brings people together. Love forgives and heals. Love mends broken relationships and creates new partnerships. Love blesses and builds up others. Love turns everything magical and makes things forever new.

For us, whom Christ has called to be his followers, love is meant to be a natural rhythm of life. Every day, you are called to love in tangible ways. As we leave this place, let us think of ways we can be a blessing to others, showing the love of Christ to people around you -- whether it is at home, at work, at school, or on the street, or in the grocery store.

As we near the end of our Lenten journey, let us hear Jesus' call to his disciples in his Farewell Discourse: Remain in me and obey my command to love. May the Holy Spirit continue to lead and guide us to the cross, so that we may bear the fruit of love! Thanks be to God! Amen.