

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 13, 2026
9:30 AM

Texts: John 13:1-5, 34-35

Theme: Love One Another

[prayer]

Church, maybe like me you spent part of your weekend reflecting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. I was eleven years old when the planes hit the towers. I watched them collapse on television, not really comprehending what I was seeing. My memory of that day is filtered through the reactions of the adults around me. I have been shaped more by the aftermath that is still unfolding than by the tragedy itself.

Something struck me about Friday's memorial ceremony at Ground Zero. Standing alongside former President George W. Bush and Vice President JD Vance was Mayor Zohran Mamdani. Mamdani is a Muslim American. As author and scholar Scot Lloyd observed,

“Twenty-five years after terrorists acting in the name of a radical interpretation of Islam attacked New York City, the city's Muslim mayor stood at Ground Zero mourning alongside families of the dead and leaders from across America's political spectrum...

We often remember the days after September 11 as a time when America came together, and there is some truth to that, although nostalgia can clean up history. Muslim Americans experienced suspicion and hostility, and some of the decisions we made in fear produced consequences we are still reckoning with. Still, there was a widespread sense that despite our differences, we belonged to one another.

Twenty-five years later, that sense of belonging feels more fragile. We increasingly inhabit separate political realities. We distrust institutions,

journalists, elections and sometimes even our neighbors. Political opponents are too easily transformed into enemies. We have become remarkably skilled at identifying threats to America from outside while sometimes remaining blind to what can weaken a democracy from within.”¹

For the next four weeks, we have accepted the invitation from The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection to participate in a Campaign for Kindness. This is the fourth campaign they have run since 2020. The stated goal of the campaign is to “increase the levels of civility and kindness across our communities and counter the growing polarization.”² We participated in a kindness campaign two years ago before the 2024 presidential election. This year we are participating again ahead of the midterm elections.

Each campaign is organized around a scriptural instruction. This year’s instruction is John 13:34: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” This command is part of Jesus’s Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John – Jesus’s “famous last words” prior to his crucifixion. In this discourse he summarizes his teachings for the followers who will carry on his mission.

But before Jesus opens his mouth, he pours water into a basin, and he kneels and he washes the feet of his disciples.

Foot washing was a commonplace act of hospitality in the ancient world. Guests would arrive with dusty, dirty, sandaled feet and the host would offer them a basin of water to clean and refresh themselves.

Normally foot washing was done by the guests themselves or by one of the host’s servants. Jesus breaks this mold. He is the host of this meal. But when he removes his clothing and wraps himself in a towel, he assumes the garb and posture of a servant. John uses the verb *tithēmi* to describe Jesus removing his clothes. This is the same verb Jesus uses when he describes laying down his life. The love Jesus demonstrates by washing his disciples’ feet foreshadows the love he will demonstrate on the cross.

¹ <https://scotloyd.com/2026/09/11/how-we-remember/>

² <https://campaignforkindness.com/>

We speak often of the cross as a sacrifice, and it was, in more ways than one. But the cross was above all an act of grace. What is the difference? Sacrifice is giving something *up*, an act of self-denial. Grace is giving something *away*, freely, joyfully, without reservation. Grace is a gift. Jesus does not just give up his life; he gives it away, as a deeply joyful expression of the limitless love he shares for us with the Father, a love at the core of his identity.

And before he gives his life away, Jesus calls his disciples and the Church to also live lives of grace – lives of limitless love for one another.

What does that love look like? Jesus shows us in this story. Recall that Peter objects to Jesus washing his feet. He feels it is below Jesus's dignity. But Jesus tells Peter that if he wants to have a share in God's kingdom, he will let Jesus wash his feet. He will let the Master be the Servant. He will let the Savior serve a sinner.

Peter relents. But do not forget that there is another disciple at that table whose feet Jesus also washes: Judas. John tells us that when Jesus does this, he already knows Judas is going to betray him (v. 11). And still, Jesus chooses to kneel down, and he cups Judas's feet in his hands and he gently bathes away the dirt and the sweat and the dead skin.

Does that action require sacrifice? Yes. Is that sacrifice an act of grace? Absolutely.

We cannot understand Jesus's command to love one another without remembering that Jesus washed his enemy's feet. And we cannot *follow* Jesus's command to love one another if we are not willing to wash our enemies' feet, too. Wash with our hospitality and service. Wash with our mercy and forgiveness. Wash with our own commitment to living lives of grace.

We try to convince ourselves that we are incapable of loving our enemies like Jesus loved his. After all, Jesus is God; we are not. His love is divine, superhuman; our love is simply human.

But we do not offer that love and grace through our own strength. We offer it through the strength of Jesus dwelling in us. Jesus tells his disciples, "I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do" (John 13:15 CEB). Jesus has set the standard of love for us. If we want to receive the love and grace of God

in our own lives, then we must also be prepared to turn around and embody that same love and grace to others – even those we call our enemies. When we do this, we demonstrate to the world the God we worship. “Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other” (John 13:34-35 CEB).

Because the Church is the Body of Christ on earth, we are the embodiment of Christ’s love in the world, which means we must love like Jesus loves.

I am not making a political argument or a foreign policy argument. I am making a theological argument. Christians are called to embody love, even to our enemies. After 9/11 we were told who to fear, who to hate. We are still being told who to fear and who to hate. But if we have been set free by the blood of Jesus, then we have been set free from fear and hate. “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). We have been set free to love. “Love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:44-45).

In the early church, Christian love was most evident at the table of fellowship, the sacred meal that eventually evolved into our practice of communion. This table was and is open to all as a foretaste of God’s kingdom come to earth. This table was and is where the Church shares the bread and the cup as a reminder that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are united to God and to one another. This table is a gift – grace – that can change our most challenging relationships...if we let it.

As you approach the Table today, I challenge you to think of one person whose feet you cannot fathom stooping to wash.

Then I want you to imagine doing just that.

Receive the sacrament today as God’s strength to love your enemy as yourself.

Amen.