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First Belton
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Series: Power of Moments
Title: The Call to Love
Text: John 13:1-17; 1 John 1:7, 9

When you think about the word love, what comes to mind? That is kind of an interesting question because our understanding of love has a way of changing over time. I know for me, my understanding of love is drastically different today than when I was in high school or college or even on the day that Jordan and I got married. Our understanding of love has a way of maturing and deepening as we grow.

Over the week I did some research as to how Americans view love. Here is what I found - for most of American culture, it seems that *"love is generally defined as a strong feeling of affection, care, and concern for another person..."*

What is love, really?

I don't necessarily think that this is a wrong definition, but I think it falls short of what love really is. Love is not just "a feeling of affection, care, and concern for another person," for if it were just a feeling, then love would fluctuate based on our mood or circumstances. For love to be true love, it must be a feeling of affection, care, and concern for another person accompanied by action. Maybe you have heard someone say, *"love is not a feeling, it is a verb."* That simply means that love cannot simply be a feeling; it is something we do.

This morning, we are going to look at a powerful moment between Jesus and His disciples as He demonstrates the true nature of love. Pick up with me in John 13:1-17.

Read along with me. *"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."*

Let me ask you a couple of questions: If you knew that this was the last night of your life, what would you be doing with your time? Now, think about this: What would you do if suddenly you realized that you were the most powerful person in the room?

I will tell you what Jesus did – He chose to love His disciples by washing their feet.

On the final night of His life, Jesus chose to wash His disciples' feet. I think it goes without saying that to wash someone's feet, even today, is not a pleasant act. But in ancient days, where everyone wore sandals and streets were dirt, washing feet was an even more unpleasant act. Not to mention it was a service done primarily by servants.

And here is Jesus, the most powerful being in the cosmos, choosing to humble Himself by taking the form of a servant to wash His followers' feet. But there is more – v. 2 and 11 help us see that not only did He wash His disciples' feet, but He also chose to wash the feet of the one who would betray Him.

Knowing all this, v. 4 says He rose from supper – a sign of action – to take on the posture and the role of a servant. What a picture!

I love the phrase from v. 1, *“He loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”* Love is not just a feeling; it is an action. If love is simply a feeling, it falls short of true love. True love requires action and most often sacrifice. In fact, love is showing up, serving, and sacrificing, even when we get nothing in return. Even if that means betrayal.

What is harder? Loving others or being loved?

You know, it is one thing to demonstrate your love for someone, but sometimes it is just as difficult to receive love as well. Being loved requires vulnerability. It reveals our messes. Peter demonstrates this point well.

As Jesus was making His way around the table to wash each of the disciples' feet, He makes His way to Peter. Look at Peter's response in v. 6: *“Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean...’”*

I love Peter! As Jesus makes His way around to Peter, He looks at Jesus and I so appreciate His response. He says, *“No way! You are not washing my feet. You are my Lord, you are my Teacher, you are my Master. You will never wash my feet!”* Don't you feel the weight of this moment?! For Peter, he cannot begin to understand how to receive such an act from the one who holds all his admiration, respect, and love.

But Jesus' response to him is profound. He says, *"Peter, I understand your hangup here. And I appreciate your admiration, respect, and love. But if I do not wash you, you will have no part with me."*

What Peter didn't understand is that Jesus' act of washing their feet was pointing to something bigger and greater than that moment. Jesus was preparing them for the moment when He would take on their punishment for their sin on the cross. By His death, they would be made clean. Later on, John would write these words in 1 John 1:7: *"The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin."* He continues in v. 9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

To that point, Jesus is telling Peter, "If you do not receive this act of love and sacrifice, you will not be saved, nor will you be cleansed of your sin." In other words, Peter, you can stand on your pride and continue to live your life trying to save yourself by your own merit, tenacity, and discipline, only to find out at the end of your life, you climbed a ladder that is leaning on the wrong wall. Or you can humble yourself and receive this act of love and service and be cleansed of your sin and enjoy a relationship with Him forever.

The problem for most folks is what keeps someone from receiving Christ is not an intellectual issue; it's not the hypocrisy of Christians, it's not the ethics of the Bible. Those are certainly issues. What keeps folks from receiving Christ is their pride.

By the way, pride is also why religion in general is attractive to people; many religions are built on a belief system that reenforces the idea that we can do things to earn salvation. For Christians there is a real danger here, too. While our religion is founded upon on the free gift of grace, we can be guilty of adding things to grace. Think about it. How many times have we helped someone receive Christ as a free gift and then said, *"Okay, now you have to do all of this stuff and by the way, don't do all that stuff."* By doing this, we can unintentionally be teaching people that while salvation was by grace, we have to do this or don't do that to maintain our salvation. Whereas, Christianity is a religion that says salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, and all our doing and don't doing is not to maintain that salvation, nor is it to earn it, but it is because of it. I do and I don't do because Christ loved me first and even when I mess up, *He loves me still*. The fact that He would love me even when I blow it frees me to continue to follow Him and His commands.

With only knowing the tip of the iceberg of what Jesus was teaching him, Peter had the right response – *"Not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"* When we recognize what is available to us on the table, by the power of the Spirit, we ought to say, *"Jesus, not my feet only but also my hands and my head! Jesus, I want all of you and I want you to have all of me."*

Oh, my goodness...

As the night moved on, Jesus returned to His place at the table, and He continued the lesson. He asks them, *“Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”*

Not only has Jesus given them deep theological truth, but He also provides them with an example to follow. What an incredible leader and friend!

Jesus provides us with an example of true love.

Jesus says in v. 15, Jesus leaves us with an example, which is helpful. But notices what else He says – the example was to demonstrate what we are to do as well.

Listen, if we are going to be serious about following Jesus, His life cannot be just an example for us, His life must be embodied by us. We are to take the command to love one another as we serve and sacrifice for one another seriously. It cannot be an empty platitude. Keep in mind that this means that we are to love all Christians, the ones we like and the ones we don’t. The ones who are easy to love and that aren’t. That doesn’t mean we have to all be best friends, even the disciples and Jesus had different relationships with one another, but it does mean that we are called to love one another by showing up, serving, and sacrificing for each other.

If it was good for Jesus, it ought to be good for us, too.

It is kind of funny to me because Jesus’ words demonstrate how well He knows us. In v. 16, He gives us the attitude that we should have as we serve one another. He writes, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, as servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”* We are to love one another by showing up, serving, and sacrificing for each other with humility. If Jesus, the most powerful being in the cosmos, could humble Himself by serving His followers, then surely, we can serve others, too.

Keep in mind that the enemy of humility is pride. It is our pride that keeps us from loving well and it is our pride that prevents us from receiving someone else’s love. To truly love one another well, we must renounce all pride – whether that is in the act of loving someone else or receiving love from someone else. Also, notice that in Jesus’ act to serve His disciples did you notice any grumbling or complaining? No, a humble heart is a grateful heart absent of grumbling and complaining.

There is a reward for loving each other well.

Again, Jesus knows us well, doesn't He? I mentioned this a few weeks ago. Often, we can look at relationships in our life as transactional. You do this, I do that. Yet, in Jesus' example, He never sits down and says, *"Okay, it's your turn. You guys wash my feet."* No, to truly love someone by showing up, serving, and sacrificing for another requires that we expect nothing in return.

Nevertheless, Jesus says, *"If you know all of these things (speaking of all he taught them), blessed are you if you do them."* While we don't show up, serve, and sacrifice for one another to gain anything, it is in that exact attitude that we experience something far greater – God's blessing.

See, that beautiful way that God has created us means the more we think about and love ourselves, the more miserable we will be. The more that we love others by showing up, serving, and sacrificing them, the more joy we will have in life. That doesn't mean we don't take care of ourselves, but we do that not for ourselves, but for God and for one another. The reason why so many people are miserable today is because they have built their lives around pleasing themselves rather than living for God and others.

This morning, we have to commit to making that change. Jesus' call is for us to embody His example and to experience the life He has created us to live – a life given over to God that exists to love Him and love others as we show up, serve, and sacrifice for His Kingdom and each other. Next week, we will talk about what is at stake if we don't.