

Jesus said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?”

A study of John 13:1-17
New Revised Standard Version

OUR SAVIOR FINISHED HIS PUBLIC DISCOURSES; he now applies himself to a private conversation with his friends. So we have an account of what happened between him and his disciples.

Introduction

John 13: 1-17

These verses tell us what Jesus said to His disciples on the night before His death. These words were spoken in one evening with only the disciples as his audience, then He gave final instructions to prepare them for His death and resurrection, and this would change their lives forever.

Four reasons can be stated as to why Christ did this:

1. To show the nature of his radical love for his disciples – Verses 1-2
2. To express his radical love through his own way of being a servant – Verses 3-5
3. To exemplify his radical love through the menial service of washing of feet. This is a major paradigm shift signifying not only a master/servant exchange, but also a spiritual transformation – Verses 6-11
4. To set an example of radical love to be followed by all believers; that they should be “the servant of servants” – Verses 12-17

Chapter 13:1-2: The nature of Jesus’ radical love for his disciples and the world

Love is the key emphasis of this chapter (John 13). Love is the laying down of one's life; and therefore to love means to love to the end (John 3:16). Jesus showed that through his ministry and continued right up to the end. He never

took away his loving kindness; even though there were some people who did not believe in his ministry. He did not lay aside his old friends, he stuck with them; he never ceased to love and take care of them. And in the crucifixion we will see the ultimate revelation of that love to its full extent.

In fact, the entire Gospel of John focuses on radical love. God's love is not static or self-centred; it reaches out and draws others in. It is God who sets the pattern of true love; and the basis for all love relationships.

Question:

How do you see God's pattern of true love operating in the world today?

Chapter 13:3-5: His radical love as exemplified through his own way of being a servant

"Jesus got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist." These verses introduce the foot-washing itself. Jesus was the model servant, and he showed his servant attitude to his disciples. Washing guest's feet was a job for a household servant to carry out when guests arrived; but Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist, as the slave would do, and washed and dried his disciples' feet. Are you willing to follow Jesus' example of serving?

In some cultures, foot-washing was something wives did for husbands, children did for their parents, and disciples did for their teachers. From this perspective, Jesus-the teacher-brought his disciples into a new situation. Jesus reversed his role with the disciples.

Jesus’ washing of his disciples' feet is a symbol of radical love and an example of servanthood. If we desire this love for God, we must be humble to what it really means and requires from us. Therefore, we see humbleness is the strength of radical love.

Question:

What are some services you can perform in your community that might be perceived as true radical love?

Talking points:

- Donating time and expertise to volunteer in your community or service organizations

- Caring for the sick in the family or in the neighbourhood.

Chapter 13:6-11: His radical love as exemplified through the menial service of washing of feet. This is a paradigm shift signifying not only a master/servant change but a spiritual transformation.

Imagine being Peter and watching Jesus wash the others feet, all the while moving closer to you. Seeing his master acting like a slave must have confused Peter. He still did not understand Jesus' teaching, that to be a leader a person must also be a servant. To Peter, it might have been more appropriate for one of the disciples to have washed Jesus' feet. But in Peter's response we see the pride and self-will that is at the heart of all sin. Would you act like Peter?

Peter responded: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Peter said, "No, you will never wash my feet."

Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet, but my hand and my head." (Life Application Bible)

If Peter is to share with Christ Jesus, and the eternal life that comes through faith in him, then Jesus must wash Peter. We all must be washed by Jesus if we want to live and serve with love.

Question:

What is the paradigm shift you see in Jesus? Can you remember a time when you did as he did, despite the misunderstanding that it created?

Talking Point:

- Surprise a neighbour or a stranger with a help in a time of emergency.

Chapter 3:12-17: His radical love as an example for all believers that in him they are transformed to be "the servant of servants."

After Jesus had finished washing their feet, he put his outer garment back on, and returned to his place at the table, asking, "Do you know what I have done to you?" (Verse 12.) Jesus did not wash his disciple's feet just to get them to be nice to each other. His greatest goal was to extend his mission on this earth after he was gone. These disciples, like us, were to move into the world serving others, and serving all people to whom they took the message of salvation.

This is an act of radical love. The disciples recognize Jesus as teacher and Lord, and Jesus confirms this as his identity; the love and humbleness Jesus displays here is not false; this is real, and is grounded in truth. While the disciples were perhaps contemplating this event that had taken place, Jesus said something else. He said, "Now that I your Teacher and Lord have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set for you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (Verses 14-15.)

What does Jesus have in mind? Some Christian denominations have established a foot-washing ceremony, either as a separate service, or as a part of the Maundy Thursday service, or even as Good Friday Divine Service. Some may argue, however, that Jesus did not say to do *what* he did but *as* he did.

All believers in Christ Jesus must manifest the radical love of God that he has revealed, through serving one another regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, age, social background or status in life. You may or may not hold a position of renowned leadership, but the exercise of leadership must follow Jesus' model of servanthood.

If Jesus took on the role of servant, and he is our Lord and Master, then we who profess to be his servants are expected to do the same. (Verse 16.) Jesus adds, "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." This reminds us that we are on a mission. Jesus instructed his disciples to go into all the world and witness to the people of all nations.

God has important work for us to do for him, but we must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one sent by the God, and the disciples, along with other believers, including

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us, are sent by Jesus. In other words, as Jesus was submissive to the God, likewise we must be under the authority of Jesus.

The pattern of life exemplified in the foot-washing is true radical love and humbleness. As Christians, we must be Christ-like. He wants us to put others on our own agenda. Look for a need and take the initiative to perform small acts of love; begin the day reflecting on others, and, most of all, let nothing hinder our relationship with God.

Jesus concludes by saying, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (Verse 17.)

Question:

Discuss ways in which you can share voluntary radical love and service.

Talking Points:

- While participating in the World Day of Prayer or local ministry of your church;
- While supporting service organizations in your community;
- Performing in a ministry of your own.
- Others

Conclusion

Radical Love: How does one put it into action?

Radical love comes from humbleness, compassion, and commitment, which involves self-denial and servanthood. It is not servility. It can't be confused with ways and systems that reproduce racism, classicism, sexism, abuse or fear. The paradigm shift can be lessons in radical love. The Holy Spirit will teach us to see, feel, and identify real love in the Body of Christ and in the world.

Talking Points:

- Share testimonies of radical love from your context, while you listen to a few examples of simple acts of love and humbleness from The Bahamas.
- Radical love is the silent feet of proud Bahamian women as they marched and stood for their rights to democracy during the Women's Suffrage Movement over fifty years ago.

- Radical love is seen in an 89-year-old woman as she sits with dignity, her head gracefully tilted as her gentle eyes smile back under the broad brim of her beautiful hat.
- We witness radical love in the resiliency of our farmers engaged in the menial tasks of sowing and reaping as they tread through the fields, and our fishermen/women as the aquamarine waves break over the barriers to wash their feet.
- Radical love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is also present in the rising of the sun that washes with warmth and touches our skin with a gentle spirit of freedom and liberation.
- Health or Financial issues;
- Work-place or Family Issues;