

RUF Bible Study – John
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister¹
November 19, 2008
John 13 – The Love of Christ

“I wanted to tell you I had sex with my boyfriend last week. It was my first time.” She said that to me in the car. She wanted to tell me. She wasn’t sure what she thought about it. She like it, but also felt guilty. She wasn’t happy about it.

“I’ve been looking at pornography. I was caught in the dorms. I feel so ashamed.” He told me this over coffee. I’ve heard this many times, and am not surprised at all by it. It’s a common story.

“I don’t know why the drugs aren’t working. I’m so depressed.” Depression robs the soul of joy, and it feels like you simply cannot escape.

“I can’t control my eating disorder any more. I’m so scared. What should I do?” I wish I received that question more often, but I have a few times. She felt trapped, helpless, and dying.

“I was arrested this weekend. My dad made me promise I would call you.” He couldn’t believe the circumstances that had all come together so he might end up in jail in Dallas.

“He broke up with me.” “I can’t believe I said that.” “I took it. I don’t know why, but I took it.” “I woke up in someone’s bed – I didn’t know where I was.”

Have you ever said one of these sentences? These people felt dirty. Have you felt dirty?

If so, you are in the right place. This message is for you. If you feel clean, then it’s not for you. If you cannot relate to dirtiness, or haven’t seen dirtiness, then you can keep reading and spend your time somewhere else. You can go hang out with the campus screamers, who claim not to have sinned for the past 15 years. But if you’re dirty, like me, then there is hope for you here.

It’s here where Jesus enters into our dirtiness, washes us and loves us. Let’s look and see how he does this for us. John tells us this story takes place during the Passover. John has been very particular about setting the various events of Jesus’ life and ministry into the context of the feasts and festivals. Now here in Jesus’ last week, the backdrop is the Passover, the great celebration of the Exodus event, where God delivered his people from bondage and captivity by a sacrifice.

Jesus knows something – his hour has come. He’s been thinking of his hour, and we’ve learned that this is a code word for his death. He’s been pushing this off for some time now, saying it was yet time for his hour. But now – finally! – it’s here. The hour has come, and we’ll be moving toward that hour in these chapters, this last half of the book of John.

Jesus has his disciples, his band of brothers, called together to celebrate the feast and partake of the Passover meal. They’re all there. Let’s look at the key players and see what this story tells us.

Judas

Let’s spend a few moments on Judas. He’s there, as one of the twelve of course, and he comes up right away in verse 2: *During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him...* John sets the stage for what is going to happen with Judas by giving us some behind the scenes comments, some foreshadowing.

We don’t know much about Judas. Most of what we know is that he is going to betray Jesus, for that is what the writes make sure you understand about him as he comes up along the way. He was in charge of the money (we learned that in John 12). Not much else particular about him, though many have tried to speculate

We know he had the best small group teacher, the best preacher and the best one-on-one counselor. He saw miracles. He saw Jesus walk on water, heal the blind, and raise Lazarus from the dead. Not only that, but he also did ministry. He was involved in the ministry of Jesus, which means he also taught and went out in Jesus’ name.

But Judas didn’t love Jesus. Something happened in his heart, something dark, something wrong. He masked it for long time, but finally had to do something about Jesus. It seems like Jesus wasn’t fulfilling the expectations he had. Jesus wasn’t taking charge like Judas thought he should. Jesus should have been a player, a power – but he kept talking about dying. Judas would show him dying. He planned to turn him in, and that plan had already been hatched.

If we think about Judas for a minute, it’s easy to turn him into a super bad guy. He’s *Judas*. No one likes a betrayer. I’m thinking of Ephialtes, the Spartan who betrayed King Leonidas by telling Xerxes and his men about the shepherd path around the 300 forces. This information led to the death of these brave men. What a Judas.

Judas may not have been quite like that, and we need to identify with him more than thinking we would never, ever do that. Judas heard Jesus. Judas saw Jesus. Judas was with Jesus. But Judas didn’t love Jesus.

¹ © Doug Serven, 2008 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2008, website: www.ouruf.org. For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

Friends, is that true for any of you? Have you listened to Jesus? That is good. But it's not loving him. You can still betray Jesus after having listened to him, or listened to people speaking about him for many, many years. Have you done things, good things? Things in the name of Jesus? That is not the same as loving Jesus.

One way you can know you actually do love Jesus is if you are growing in love, if you're growing in the fruit of the spirit. Not just one or two of them that are your natural proclivities, but in some measure all of them. Yes, it will be a growth that comes in fits and starts, but it will be growth. You should ask your friends and family if they see the fruit of the Spirit, connected to each other, working together, in your life.

Here's what I find amazing about this – Jesus still loves Judas. Jesus gives Judas the supper, and even feeds him himself in verses 26-27. Judas is still in the covenant, and he's still loved by and connected to Jesus. Jesus still washes Judas' feet just like all the rest of them.

If you hate Jesus, he will still love and serve you. That is true love, one that will serve enemies.

Then, Judas slinks out into the night. He has made his choice, and he is in league with the darkness of the world.

Peter

Our next main figure in this text is Peter. Perhaps you can relate to him. He is the one who usually speaks up because he doesn't fully understand or he thinks he understands. He puts his foot in his mouth. We're glad he does, because that normally helps us out a great deal as Jesus explains to Peter and we get to listen in. I think Jesus and Peter were best friends.

We haven't gotten to explain what is exactly happening here. As they've gathered for the Passover meal, they realize something is missing. No one is there to wash their feet.

These people live in a dirty, dusty culture. They wear sandals all the time, and their feet are always filthy. So when they gather to eat, not only would they dab a little perfume on them to hide their stink (John 12), but they didn't feel clean until they had their feet washed.

I say "had their feet washed" because someone else would do it. A slave or servant would do it, as this was seen as the worst job you could have. The Jews had a collective foot phobia; they thought feet were disgusting, as many of you do.

There weren't any servants there to do this job, so you can imagine the disciples wondering what would happen, wondering if Jesus might pick each of them. So they're looking away, inching farther away from the basin of water, afraid to make too big of a commotion or it might attract attention and then they'd get picked for that.

Jesus does something they would never have expected. He moves to the bowl of water. He takes off his robe, takes a towel and wraps it around his waist. Now Jesus is dressed just as a servant boy would be. Jesus takes the basin of water, and he asks them to give him their feet one by one so he can wash them.

Peter flips out. He cannot take this picture. He cannot fathom how this is possible. How can the Son of God, the Messiah, the One Sent from God do this thing?!

So Peter speaks up. This shall not be!, he says. You may never wash my feet! Peter is Mr. Superlative and Absolute.

Jesus responds to Peter firmly. "*If I do not wash you, you will have no share with me.*"

Peter fires back, Then do all of me! Give me a bath. Let's do it. Maybe Peter starts to take his robe off.

Hold on, Peter. Maybe Jesus holds his hand out. He says, "*The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.*"

Jesus teaches Peter about what it means to be clean and what Jesus is doing for Peter at that very moment. We'll look at that when we get to Jesus.

First though I want you to see that what gets in the way is Peter's pride. He won't let Jesus serve him like that.

He is very content to have Jesus be a good teacher, a wise man, a rabbi who says profound things. But when Jesus starts to talk about death and dying, when he moves into sin and payment for sin, redemption, then we have to draw the line. Simon says no to Jesus. He's the only one who does that to his face, though of course it happened and happens all the time. This wasn't a rejection of Jesus' friendship, but a denial of who Jesus really is – their Servant Lord. Of all the inappropriate things you've done, this is the most inappropriate, Peter says. This is embarrassing, Jesus.

Why is this? Because pride gets in the way. Pride tells us that we don't need to be washed, not by God. "Pride has moved from being the chief of the Seven [deadly sins], the root of much evil, to being the root of all virtue, a positive good to be lovingly practiced and cultivated. Pride has been rehabilitated from being a vice to be avoided and has become a great virtue to be cultivated – Black Pride, Gay Pride, Southern Pride, and on and on. "Pride is misdirected love, as love perverted and misapplied. This points to the insidious, subtle quantity of much of our sin. If sin were a matter of performing some self-evident, obvious wrong, then we would never be sinners. Yet sin is rarely self-evidently bad. It takes training, analysis, and much living and reflection, prayer and quiet consideration to be a sinner – that is, to know sin when one does it. The rest of the world, uninformed by the story of Jesus, considers Pride an essential characteristic of the well-functioning personality. Christians are taught to be more suspicious."²

Peter is saying that he would rather eat the meal with dirty feces feet right by the food than allow a good man to serve him. That is pride.

Jesus was showing humility, and Peter was showing irreligious pride. Jesus answers that pride though. He says

² William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, 33-34

something more severe: Unless I wash you, you have no part of me! This is a throw down. Unless Jesus does this, there is no salvation for Peter. If Peter denies the humility of the Suffering Servant, he cannot take part in what Jesus is doing. His refusal to be served by Jesus renders him unusable as a future servant of Jesus. Until Peter submits to who Jesus really is, how can he become one of his disciples?

If you're too good to be served by Jesus, then you don't understand anything at all about him. Will you allow yourself to be washed, to be served by Jesus?

But then we get something more, another outburst by Peter. This is the religious answer. Then Peter's passion goes overboard. Wash all of me, then! Does Peter really mean this? Is he really going to strip down and get a sponge bath in front of the others to show his devotion to Jesus? What Peter is doing here is overdoing it. He is making a show of how pious he is to be washed by Jesus all over.

How willing to be served he is. How unwilling again he is to let Jesus set the agenda of what it is he is doing for him. Peter wants an even greater experience. He wants to minimize the dirtiness of his feet by adding to that the cleanliness of his body. Thus, the percentage of dirtiness goes down.

Jesus' answer points out that he's trivializing Jesus' work on his behalf by saying that it isn't good enough to only wash his feet. It's another form of pride. It is the pride of the older brother in the prodigal son story. The one who moved away from the love of the father by doing everything right.

All of this is an illustration by Jesus of our spiritual condition. He is showing us by serving us. But he is showing also that if you are clean on the inside, if you are justified and in him, his friend, his disciple, then you are okay. But you still need your feet washed. You need sanctification. You are not all the way clean all the time yet. You still get dirty and still need the work of the servant on your behalf.

Jesus

So what exactly is Jesus up to? The text tells us Jesus is showing us the extent of his love for his people, his followers. He gives them an example, and he serves them in this amazing way. It's all about love.

Yes, Jesus is courageous. He's going to the cross to die in a few days. He is about to be whipped and tortured. He's about to experience the wrath of God in a way you and I could never, ever imagine. He's not going to die or his own wrongdoings – he's dying for all the sin of all his people. In the face of such trials, he still cares enough for his disciples to wash their feet. Wow.

Yes, Jesus is also incredibly forgiving. These are the people who do not fully understand him. Judas is about to betray him, but the others aren't exactly standing by his side. They scatter and deny him. Yet, he still serves them and loves them.

Jesus is showing them deep, abiding love when he serves them this way. He's not talking about love. He doesn't draw it up on a chalkboard, or refer them to a novel. He shows them love. He is love for them.

Mark 10:45 says, "*For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Jesus is serving in a big, bold way here, and this is why he came. To be glorified in such a role, even to death. He's illustrating just what is about to happen writ large in his death. His hour has come.

When he washes their feet, he's entering into their humanity. We've already said how this is demeaning and disgusting. Feet get dirty. They would have bruises, cuts and scrapes on them. They'd have various funguses and diseases.

A few years ago, I got some plantars warts and athletes foot. It was really, really gross. I'd scrape them, dig at them, apply medicine on them, and finally they cleared up. I wouldn't have wanted someone to have to clean those up.

Feet aren't only gross, they're also so similar. You don't get much personality in the feet. They're essential parts of our bodies, but if we lined up everyone by their feet, you wouldn't be able to tell who is who. They're so basic to who we are.

And washing feet is also an intimate thing. I was reading a commentary where the pastor said he was surprised at how uneasy he was at holding someone's foot, washing between the toes and drying it off. It's like if you walked in on a guy giving a girl a foot massage on a couch in the library. You'd wonder how long they'd been dating. That just isn't a normal thing. My wife goes into a certain ecstasy when I rub her feet – she loves it (I don't do it often enough). So there's something personal and intimate going on.

It's also necessary. Feet get dirty, and they need to be cleaned. They stink and need to be cleaned. They get infected, and they need to be cleaned.

This is all a picture for us, isn't it? Jesus takes the role of a servant even though he is a king. He takes the towel, enters into our lives at a basic, needful level and he serves us there with intimate, kind love.

Even though he deserved to be served and washed, he serves and washes others. He shows his people that level of love and devotion. It's through his Incarnation – the Christmas story! – that we get that grace he gives us. If he hadn't come to serve and love his people in his hour of humiliation and death, we would not know the glory of his love.

Us

Let's get to the application. Let's begin with things you can do.

This text is about serving others. Jesus gave us an example of this love, this servant-hearted love. How can we love others like this?

You can give up one of your summers, move overseas and serve Christ's church with truth, love and social justice. You can spend a summer in Athens, Greece, or a town nearby. If you're there, you'd play with the kids in the neighborhood.

Their parents are usually poor immigrants who both work all day, so the kids are left unattended. You could serve them by tutoring them at the youth center. You can help build churches, meet people. (www.mtw.org)

The same is true in Peru – they have so much to do there, and the mission has an English school where you could spend your time teaching English, which is a huge ministry down there. This mission is also building clinics, schools and churches, and they need help. (www.perumission.org)

I have had students spend their summer in Kenya working in the slums. There is tremendous need there, needless to say, and you would experience foot-washing like never before. You would help the people in dire physical need, but also teach them Sunday School and English skills, and love them in a way perhaps you have not experienced.

You could also take two years and be an RUF intern on a campus here in the US. We need people who love and serve people to meet students, listen to them, and point them to the Word and the church. (www.ruf.org)

I think you should consider giving up a summer, or a year or two, because you love Jesus, and know how much he has loved you.

Those are huge things. What about some medium-level things?

You should consider moving back into the dorms. This sounds crazy I know. But you cannot serve and love people you do not ever see. It's very difficult when you are out of proximity to people. If you get closer to people, you can see their needs and serve them. You'll be there. Most of you try to get out of the dorms as fast as you can, and it's understandable. The dorms aren't big. You don't have much freedom there. But that's the beauty of it. You are squished together and, if you have the eyes of faith and the heart of the Savior, you can minister to people in away you will never be able to again.

I have a heart for this because this is one of the ways God used in my life to bring me to himself. I was in the dorms as a freshmen, and I met and hung out with upper-classmen who had moved back into the dorms so they could strategically minister to people just like me. We ate together. We played intramurals together. We went on roadtrips together. They invited me to Bible study and I came, and God worked in my life. It's an important ministry of just living and being there.

That still takes a fairly large commitment, and it costs money, I know.

What about small things?

You need to look around you. Serve the people next to you. Wash their feet. You don't have to go on a foot-washing initiative or campaign. You need to start small, start with those around you.

You can ask someone on a date. Someone who hasn't been on one in awhile. You could say yes to a date, even with someone you wouldn't want to be dating. Both of those would be kindnesses to people.

You can sit next to someone you don't know. People are lonely out there. You can ask someone to go and eat with you. You can open up your dorm room and invite people in. You can sit with them for as long as they need instead of going on the next thing so quickly. You can adopt someone for the Angel Tree at Christmas. You can give money so someone else can go to the Winter Conference. You can wash the dishes after Thanksgiving at home. You can volunteer a few hours on Sunday nights to help the youth group. You can get involved in Big Brother, Big Sister. You can go pet dogs at the Animal Shelter like Mitchell and Katherine do sometimes. You can go to things you don't want to go to because it will help other people get connected. You can have people over for dinner and a movie. You can pick up your chairs after church. You can give someone a hug. You can talk to people who are sad. You can forgive someone who has hurt you.

Wow. That is a lot of things to do. Are you ready for all of that? Are you ready to give your life away like that?

All of those things are important, but they're secondary to and resultant from something else. Because if you simply go and DO them, you won't be able to make it. I'll have to start being a cheerleader to keep your spirits up or a slavedriver to whip you when you start flagging. Every week, I'll need to beat you up and motivate you to KEEP DOING IT.

Sometimes you do need a kick in the pants. There needs to be discipline and external motivation at times. But that's not enough. You need something else. Many of you are tired, tired, tired of hearing this message.

I have something else for you, and it's something I need to. Remember – we're a dirty people. I am a dirty pastor and campus minister.

Just in this past week I did something I don't want to do. I hate that I did this, and it makes me feel dirty, ashamed and unworthy. My reaction is just like yours – I shrink away from God, the church and community. I don't feel like I deserve my wife's love or my family's love or my friends' love. Not until I can get my act together – then I can reengage and reemerge.

That's because I don't really believe the gospel. I don't really understand it for myself. I don't live by it like I should. If I did, I would long for the times when I could confess sin and receive forgiveness. When I could hear the gospel preached and have it wash over my soul. When I could sing the songs of the faith and hear the words of the saints who have gone before me. When I could smell, touch and taste God's grace to me in the Lord's Supper as he reminds me in a tangible way just what the sacrifice of reconciliation is.

I would get this better if I remembered that I am a sinner. And Jesus came to save sinners. He didn't come to save those who are well, but those who are sick and dying and dead. That's you. That's me. It's when I don't think that's me that I'm in trouble. When I'm identifying as a sinner and crying out for the mercy of God – that's when I'm cleaned up.

Do you need cleansing tonight? Some of you need cleansing for the first time. You've never allowed Jesus to clean you. It's embarrassing to be cleaned by someone else. We want to do it ourselves. Let Jesus clean you.

Others of you have been cleansed but have started to wash yourselves on your own more often. You have not received Jesus' cleansing in a long time. You have been wary of him, afraid he is mad at you for what you've done. You feel dirty. You

have taken your clothes off. You have looked at that web site. You have hated your friend. You have gossiped. You have cheated on a test. You have ignored someone who wants to be your friend. You have drunk too much. You have been binging.

Let Jesus cleanse you. Let him wash you. Let the gospel be true for you. Do not tarry til you're better, or you'll never come at all.

*1.ø The love of Christ is rich and free; Fixed on His own eternally;
Nor earth, nor hell, can it remove; Long as He lives, His own He'll love.*

*2. His loving heart engaged to be Their everlasting Surety;
'Twas love that took their cause in hand, And love maintains it to the end.*

*Chorus: Love cannot from its post withdraw; Nor death, nor hell, nor sin, nor law,
Can turn the Surety's heart away; He'll love His own to endless day.*

*3. Love has redeemed His sheep with blood; And love will bring them safe to God;
Love calls them all from death to life; And love will finish all their strife.*

*4. He loves through every changing scene, Nor aught from Him can Zion wean;
Not all the wanderings of her heart Can make His love for her depart. (Repeat chorus)*

*5. At death, beyond the grave, He'll love; In endless bliss, His own shall prove
The blazing glory of that love Which never could from them remove.*