

Theme: AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

- I. He loves to the end
- II. He lovingly corrects
- III. He leaves an example of love
- IV. He defines love

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

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

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Beloved of the Lord,

Call Mom. Tuck the kids in. Tell your wife you love her. Write your friends. If you had twenty-four hours left to live, what would you do? If you answer that question like so many, you probably want to ensure those you love know you love them.

With 24 hours left, Jesus also wanted to make sure those he loved knew he loved them. So on the first Maundy Thursday, Jesus loved his own. As we gather to hear God's Word this Maundy Thursday, we also hear Jesus' "new command." This command is where we get the name "Maundy" or "Command

Thursday.” We could call this Command Thursday “Loving Thursday.” It’s in Jesus’ words: **“AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, so you must love one another.”**

“Just before the Passover Festival,” Jesus has the end in mind. Sitting in the upper room with their teacher, the disciples will soon eat the Passover meal. The table’s set, dishes being prepared. Jesus knows his time has come. He will suffer, die, and reveal himself as Messiah on a cross. Yet John here records Jesus would **“leave this world and go to the Father.”** Glory awaited Jesus after suffering. Like him, we suffer now on earth for a while, but we look forward to eternal glory afterwards.

Jesus’ thoughts turn not to his imminent suffering or coming glory, but to his disciples, his own, to you and me. He loved them throughout his time on earth. Now **“he loved them to the end.”**

This is love for love’s sake. Jesus doesn’t love because he gets something from it or receives some honor. Jesus loves because he has chosen to love, a conscious commitment. His love sacrifices self for the good of another. Not unlike a fireman loves any person he finds in a burning building, putting his very life on the line to help another. So Jesus loves to the end.

Before they start the meal, Jesus knows one of his own will betray him. Before the meal, before the end, Jesus has all power. Over everything. He doesn’t always use his power, but as God, he knows everything and can do everything. He came from God. His return to God the Father draws near.

At this critical moment, true God with all power gets up from the table just before supper. He takes his outer robe off, grabs a wash basin, and wraps a towel around his waist. Jews customarily washed their feet before such an important feast, but no one offered to do the washing. God with all power, full of love for his students, stoops down. He washes grimy, dirty feet. Not a job fitting for a leader of a group, much less the all-powerful God!

We’ve sunk to a new low. They can do this themselves. It’s beneath you, like getting tying the shoes of other adults! How can Jesus, master of all things, wash feet?

Peter gets it. Jesus approaches Peter. “Lord, are *you* going to wash *my* feet.” In the original, Peter makes a contrast between *you* and *my*. He recognizes he is below having Jesus wash his feet; it ought to be the other way around. But Peter doesn’t get it. In love, Jesus corrects him. **“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”** Like the now and later candy that starts hard and gets softer, Peter’s understanding will go from hard to soft. Jesus says, Now Peter gets stubborn: **“You shall never wash my feet.”**

How can Peter, who has followed Jesus everywhere for three years and seen love in action, now, at the very end, fail so badly? Jesus demonstrates perfect humility, and he outright tells Jesus he knows better! How can I, after being washed in baptism and marked on the head and heart, still tell Jesus how he ought to run his kingdom? Sometimes we think we know better than the God who loves perfectly.

So in love, Jesus rebukes us, just as he rebukes Peter. **“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”** For Peter, this means he will no longer be Jesus’ disciple if he insists on his way. Jesus also calls us to repent, to admit we were wrong and trust in him. We cannot claim to follow Jesus and hold onto our sinful ways, either.

Peter isn’t done, though. **“Then, Lord, not just my feet but my head and hands as well!”** Isn’t this human nature—once we avoid one extreme we jump right to the other? Peter refused Jesus, but when Jesus explains the consequences of his actions, Peter tries to get more from Jesus than he said. People so often settle in unbelief or fanaticism, on hatred or love, on left or right. Still, Jesus loves as only he can. Peter doesn’t need his head and hands washed; he only needs his feet washed. Then he, and the disciples, will be clean—with the exception of Judas.

What a contrast! In love, Jesus washes his betrayer's feet! After washing them all, he returns to his place. **"Do you understand what I have done for you?"** he asks. Did they learn the lesson he in love taught? **"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am."** Jesus embraces the fact he is the Lord. He is God. And he still teaches them to the end.

The disciples don't understand yet. **"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."** Does Jesus mean that the disciples need to start washing each other's feet right away? Should we be washing each other's feet tonight? Do you understand what he has done for you?

Jesus set an example for us. An example, like a model for sculpting. In other words, Jesus' example tells us not so much that we have to wash each other's feet every year on Maundy Thursday, or that we should start carrying around wash basins and towels so we can wash each other's feet whenever we run into each other. No, Jesus shows us humility. Jesus defines love.

Love is love, people say. What does that mean? Even school children know you can't explain a word with the word itself; it empties the word of meaning. No, Jesus defines love for us. Jesus is love. And love for Jesus is obedience to his commands. So he gives us a new command: **"Love one another."** How is that new, you ask? Jesus spoke of love before this. He said love is fulfilling the law. Obeying the ten commandments means loving God and neighbor. So this isn't new in the way that you buy new a 2021 car; it's new like recharged batteries are new. It is not new in time, but new in explanation. Jesus' new command: **Love AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.**

Come on! That's impossible. If Jesus loves perfectly, God must be setting us up to fail! We can't ever meet Jesus' requirement! True. That's not the end, though. Jesus is love. **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.** Jesus loves. His love doesn't fail. He loves to the end. He loves to the cross and beyond. His love doesn't die. He loves you. **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.** His love forgives. **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.** He has loved you! He still loves you! Because he won't stop loving you, you don't stop loving either. No, you won't love perfectly now. We have in Jesus' words both what we do, love, and how we do it, because he loves me. **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.**

You don't have to fetch wash basins for each other's feet. Instead, humble yourself. Make yourself a fool if need be. No job is too low. Jesus got down in the dust and washed feet. Get dirty! Love one another. Sweep the floor. Wash the table. Clean up after the kids. Teach the kids to clean up for each other. Love one another. Show the world, show one another, show your family the love Jesus shows you! **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.**

What would you do with 24 hours left in life? Jesus loved. He loved to the end. He loved by rebuking. Loved by washing. Loved by commanding, defining love for us. **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.** He loved by suffering, dying. He loved by rising. Only Jesus can save you from your sins. He forgives you. Forgive one another. He loves you. Love one another. As he has loved, and still loves, you. Amen.