

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

As For You...Follow Jesus!

Study #13

Introduction: Preparation time for Jesus' followers...

Before I left for the trip I recently took to Sweden, I did what you would have done. I prepared.

I was going to a place I'd never been, so I looked at the weather forecast (of course) to see what clothes I would need.

I verified that my passport was valid, got a refresher on international travel protocols (I hadn't traveled in a while...), and enrolled in TSA pre-check.

And, of course, I spent lots of time preparing the lectures I would give at the Holsby Bible School.

My assignment was to teach through the Gospel of John - just what we've been studying - but the context was different. I was slated to give thirteen lectures over four days to a group of sixty young adults, and I wanted to be prepared.

To increase the likelihood of success, I spent lots of hours over a few months preparing. Preparing is important.

So, you'll prepare in advance of your next "big thing" to increase your chances of success and your shot at a good experience.

Preparation is essential for traveling, for competing in an athletic contest, or for a big job interview.

Jesus bought into the "preparation is essential" idea, as is clear from the section of John's Gospel we'll be moving through over the next few weeks.

We skipped this section prior to Easter, sticking with the story line of a Palm Sunday triumphal entry that John followed by recording Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion.

We're backing up now to explore the section in John that records the last hours Jesus spent with His disciples before He died.

These disciples had spent the last three years in Jesus' physical presence. Those years had certainly been the best years of their lives.

They now believed in Jesus, depended on Jesus, and loved Jesus. He was their life - and they were about to experience an earthquake that would change everything.

They didn't yet know that, but Jesus did.

So...

...just as He had spent years teaching them and showing them how to live "*the Jesus way*," in His physical presence...

...on this final night He spent hours preparing them for what life would be like for them, and how to navigate life, and how to be faithful to God in His physical absence.

This evening would be a critical equipping time for these guys. And, since we also live in Jesus' physical absence, what we'll find in John 13-17 is critical equipping for us, too.¹

¹ As we have seen repeatedly, John wrote His account of the life and ministry of Jesus to bring his readers to a saving knowledge of Jesus. [John 20:30] So then, *many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are*

not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His Name. Chapters 13-17 of John are different. Here, He teaches, trains, and

Jesus and the apostles in The Upper Room...

When we catch up to Jesus on this last night, He had already given His final “**sign**,” which was the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. He had given His final talk to the crowds in Jerusalem.

It was just Jesus and the Twelve apostles all gathered together in an upstairs room in a Jerusalem home.² They had come together on a Thursday evening to eat the annual Jewish Passover meal.³

Note: Jesus and His disciples (who were Galileans) ate the Passover meal a day *before* the Jews in Jerusalem (Judeans) ate their Passover meal. This was due to a difference in the calendars kept by Judeans and Galileans. Galileans would have observed it on Thursday, as we see here in John 13.⁴

John lets us see what Jesus was thinking on this Thursday night.

“Setting the Table” at the Last Supper (13:1-3)

The Situationally Completely Aware Jesus (13:1, 3)

THIS is Jesus’ “hour” (v. 1)

[1]...Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father...

For His whole life, Jesus had been aiming at this “**hour**.” It is “*go time*.”

He will soon return to the Father He had left in glory when He came to earth to fulfill His mission.

equips those who have received “**life in His Name**” - to now live for Him. And this section is also VERY helpful to those who have not yet believed in Jesus. By listening to what Jesus has to say here, anyone who is still considering the claims and the promises of Jesus will learn more about what life in Jesus is all about, so that when they do believe in Jesus, they will be equipped to shine for Him.

² Most of the material we find in this section (John 13-17) is only recorded by John and not in the other gospels.

Now, skip down a little bit. You’ll read that Jesus was consciously aware of three truths that steeled Him for what He was about to face.

Three truths Jesus knew (v. 3)

[3] Jesus, knowing that the Father had handed all things over to Him, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God...

He knew His own limitless resources, given to Him by the Father. He knew where He had come from. Glory, with the Father. He knew where He was going. Back to glory, with the Father.

His heavenly Father has thoroughly equipped him to fulfill His life’s purpose. He was prepared for what was in front of Him.

And with all of that staring straight at Him - the betrayal and denial, the trials, flogging, mocking, and death - He was not preoccupied with Himself.

No, the welfare of His disciples was foremost on His mind.

Oh, How Jesus Loved His Disciples! (13:1)

[1]... having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

Catch that. He loved them “**to the end**.” Meaning that Jesus never stopped loving His disciples. He loved them to the end of His life.

AND meaning that He loved them “*to the uttermost*.” Nobody had ever loved any of these men to the extent that Jesus loved them.

³ This Gospel is the only one that does not show Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper at this meal.

⁴ From Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ by Harold Hoehner. The following day, all Israel observed Passover and sacrificed the Passover lamb in the middle of the afternoon, precisely the time at which Jesus, the Lamb of God, died.

His love for them was the most sacrificial, giving, and honest love they had ever known.

He'll confirm that love on the next day - the day we call "Good Friday" - by the lengths to which He was willing to go to for them.

Which, of course, is also the love we receive when we believe and are adopted into God's family as His child.

Today, Jesus' love, in a world of earthquakes and wars and inflation and cancer and divorce, social upheaval and political turmoil, is the only solid foundation upon which we can build lives that have real meaning and purpose.

There is nothing like the Jesus' love for you.

Of course, John focused on Jesus, here. But he highlighted another character: Judas Iscariot.

By the time the crew had climbed up the stairs for this Passover meal, Judas had already decided to carry out his plan.

Judas' Course is Set (13:2)

[2] During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him...

It is not unusual to see someone - in a book or in a movie - paint a picture of Judas as a deluded political radical who was merely trying to advance Jesus' cause by his actions.

I don't believe that's who Judas was or what Judas was up to.

I think the best understanding of what Judas had planned to do was to ruthlessly and with premeditation, hand Jesus over to the ruling Jews who would, predictably, do to Jesus exactly what they did to Him.

The Bible portrays Judas as completely culpable for his actions. The devil put a diabolical idea into a very receptive mind.

Aside from the mention of Judas, though, the main focus at the start of the meal was the action Jesus took mid-way through the supper.

He washed His disciples' feet.

The Confusion Brought About by Foot-Washing (13:3-8a)

Feet Washed by the Ultimate Servant (13:3-5)

In our 2026 San Antonio, we don't consider foot-washing a necessary courtesy that a host should provide for his or her guests.

But then, today in San Antonio, our streets are mostly paved, and we have designated garbage dumps.

In the ancient world, foot-washing was a necessary service offered to anyone who visited someone else's home.

A servant (usually the servant lowest on the totem pole) was given the assignment of washing the feet of guests. No guest would be assigned or expected to wash his or her own feet.

And foot-washing was necessary because of the condition of the city streets of a typical ancient near eastern city.

All of us can imagine what feet would look like (and smell like) after a long day of trudging through muddy streets while wearing sandals.

Along with mud, garbage was dumped into the streets, where dogs roamed, eating the garbage, and then leaving behind an even bigger mess.

Mud and grime - and more - were caked on to the sandals and the feet of the twelve men who ate the Passover meal with Jesus.

As they all entered this home, they probably had expected the common courtesy of having their feet washed. But they weren't greeted by a servant at the door. Their feet were not washed.

And, not wanting to wash their own feet, they all proceeded to the Upper Room to eat the Passover - dirty feet and all.

At some point during the Passover Meal itself, Jesus did the unthinkable.

[3] Jesus...[4] got up from supper, and laid His outer garments aside, and He took a towel and tied it around Himself. [5] Then He poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples' feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself.

Jesus untied and removed His disciples' sandals⁵ and started washing their sweaty, smelly, grimy, filthy feet, one after the other.

Most of us would have a hard time letting anyone wash our feet. It would feel uncomfortable. Can you imagine Jesus kneeling in front of you to wash your feet?

We'd be shocked and self-conscious. We might even have done what Peter did.

Jesus was making the rounds, washing His disciples' feet. We don't know how many sets of feet He had washed before He came to a very confused Simon Peter.

The Foot-Washing of Simon Peter (13:6-8)

Peter's confusion (vv. 6-7)

[6] So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

Peter knew that if he was the Lord and Master, he sure wouldn't be washing feet.

Foot-washing was to be done at the door, before dinner, by the lowest servant. Here it was being done at the table, during dinner, by Jesus – their Leader.

Jesus understood Peter's confusion and had words for him.

[7] Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not realize right now, but you will understand later."

While that answer might have satisfied some people, it didn't satisfy Peter. He wasn't about to sit still and let His Lord wash his feet.

Peter's misguided resolve (v. 8)

[8a] Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!"

That was said in about as emphatic a manner as language allows.⁶ You can hear the emotion in Peter's words.

And we understand where Peter's coming from. We wouldn't have liked it if Jesus had washed our feet, either.

I would have been thinking the same thing. "Lord, it isn't Your place to do this!" I'll bet that's what all the disciples were thinking.

But there was purpose to Jesus' action here. There always is. And it was necessary that He wash Peter's feet.

We'll spend the rest of our time this morning listening to Jesus explain how this simple act of foot-washing provides two crucial life lessons for all of us who follow Him.

⁵ Remember John 1:27, where John the Baptist declared that he was unworthy to loosen Jesus' sandal strap.

⁶ Literally, it would be something like, "Never shall You wash my feet forever."

The Clarity Brought About by Foot-Washing (13:8b-17)

Jesus' Foot-Washing...and Our Connection to Him (13:8b-10)

No washing, no relationship (vv. 8b-9)

[8b] Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no place with Me."

So, being "**washed**" by Jesus pictures something foundational to a relationship with Jesus. No washing. No relationship.

So, Peter the Pendulum swung from "You'll never wash my feet!" to this.

[9] Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

Why settle for a partial cleansing? Surely a more thorough washing would guarantee even more connection to Jesus.

I feel sorry for Peter in this conversation. Everything he says gets corrected, as here.

Bathing makes clean...and they aren't all clean (vv. 10-11)

[10] Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet; otherwise he is completely clean. And you are clean - but not all of you." [11] For He knew the one who was betraying Him; it was for this reason that He said, "Not all of you are clean."

Not all twelve of the apostles were "**clean**." This is important. He was talking about Judas. Judas wasn't clean.

That is to say, Judas wasn't related to Jesus the way the others were. Judas wasn't saved.

But, for the rest, who had "**bathed**" and were "**clean**," this foot-washing had tremendous meaning.

Bathe once; wash feet repeatedly

Foot-washing gives us a powerful picture of what it looks like for someone who has "**washed**" to sustain close fellowship with Him on a day-by-day basis.

To have "**washed**" or "**bathed**" is to have believed, to have been born again, to possess eternal life.

Believers in Jesus are clean, not because of anything they have done, but because of what Jesus did on the cross.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As Jesus Himself said from the cross with respect to forgiveness, **[John 19:30] "It is finished!"**

But, as it is in the natural world, so it is in our walk with Jesus. One bath per lifetime doesn't cut it.

We must bathe or shower or rinse off regularly, because we're going to get dirty out there.

So, when I lose my footing, spiritually speaking, when I slip and fall into a muddy sin pit, I need Jesus to clean me up. The process that leads to Jesus' washing my dirty feet begins with confession.

For me to "**confess**" is to say the same thing about my sin that God says about it.

It would be for me to say that my...

...complaining.

...silence when words were called for.

...carelessly chosen words that actually did damage to someone.

...focus on the number of people who show up on a Sunday morning (think "cistern-digging")...

...are all as wrong and as ugly and as damaging as God says they are.

These aren't hypotheticals for me. I've confessed to God each of these in recent days.

And each time I have confessed, Jesus has washed my feet. He has cleaned me up, so that I can, again, walk with Him in confidence.

There's more about my dirty-feet-story that I didn't mention just now. But I have learned to be specific in confession. And the specifics I listed are all a part of my current next-step with Jesus story.

How about you?

Do you have dirty feet? Because of things you've said and done, or not said and not done, do you need a fresh cleansing from God?

If so, you'll find the cleansing you need when you go to Jesus and confess.

And what does Jesus do when we confess? Here's the picture.

He rises from His throne in glory, wraps Himself with a servant's towel, fills a basin with water and washes your feet so that you can walk again in the confidence that you are clean again.

At some point soon, all of us are going to get dirty feet. Count on it. The good news is that Jesus has provided a way to get clean.

I imagine that the Apostle John had this scene of foot-washing in his mind when he wrote in his first letter, **[1 John 1:9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

You and I can put this gracious gift to good use and experience the cleansing power of Jesus when we sin by confession.

After this explanation of foot-washing, Jesus went on to wash Peter's feet, and all the other apostle's feet.

Then, He went back to His place at the table, rejoining the Twelve who would have been relieved that THAT foot-washing lesson was over.

But it wasn't over.

Jesus went on to bring up foot-washing all over again to emphasize something else about walking with Him.

He went on to use foot-washing to explain how the community that would form in His Name was to be with each other.

Jesus' Foot-Washing...and Our Connection to Each Other (13:12-17)

Jesus stopped for a de-briefing (v. 12)

[12] Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you?"

And this time, nobody said a word. They had all watched as Jesus corrected Simon Peter every time he opened his mouth.

So, now, they were all thinking, *"Well, we think You just washed our feet. But why don't You go ahead and tell us what You just did."*

In the absence of a response, Jesus explained what is involved in following Him, the consummate Servant.

What does it mean to follow a Servant? (vv. 13-16)

[13] "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord'; and you are correct, for so I am. [14] So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."⁷

⁷ No New Testament text requires foot-washing of believers, not even 1 Timothy 5:10, as Paul there is using foot-washing as a figure of speech to refer to serving, generally.

There was never any question about who the Leader of the group was. Jesus was the Leader. And, for three years He set an example in all kinds of settings.

Whenever He wanted to build some character trait into His followers, He first modeled it.

- He wanted them to become courageous, so He modeled courage by clearing out the buyers and sellers from the temple in Jerusalem.
- He wanted them to be prayer warriors, so He modeled prayer by spending whole nights in prayer to His Father.
- He wanted them to be faithful and full of faith, so He modeled faith by trusting His Father for His own daily needs.

Jesus also wanted them to embrace servanthood...so He modeled service.

At this meal, He took off the festive garments that people always wore at Passover, clothed Himself as a lowly servant, filled a basin with water, and performed the menial service of washing His disciples' feet.

And the message that this action carried was so clear that it hardly needs saying. But He said it. And we're listening.

[15] "For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. [16] Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."

Salvation is a gift of grace, given to the one who believes in Jesus. Justification before God is by faith. God gives eternal life to the one who believes in Jesus.

Discipleship is the life into which God calls His born-again, justified children.

Discipleship is a walk into good works, a walk into Jesus' abundant life, a walk into partnership with God, and a walk into rich reward.

And servanthood isn't optional for the disciple. If we who believe in Jesus are going to be Jesus-following disciples, we're going to lean into service.

And Jesus' conclusion to this first act in the Upper Room drama puts an exclamation mark to all He's been saying.

Knowing is nothing; DOING is what it's all about! (v. 17)

[17] "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

- I get no credit for memorizing John 13 - unless I serve you.
- Understanding first century foot-washing protocols is pointless - unless I serve you.
- The ability to exegete every word from this passage counts for nothing - unless I serve you.

Jesus calls us to follow Him into servanthood in every arena of our lives.

What would it look like if, today, you adopted a servant's mentality at home?

What would your wife / your husband / your kids / your parents / your siblings / your roommate - say if you gave yourself to serving them in Jesus' Name? What creative ways could you find to serve people in your home?

What if, tomorrow, you took a servant's mentality with you to work or to school?

What difference would it make in the way you relate to your teachers, classmates, and people you work with if you accepted the role of a servant?

And what would it look like if you leaned into serving your brothers and sisters in Christ, here, at church.

Service can be behind the scenes, inconspicuous, and low-key. In fact, I'd urge that we all think small. For instance...

- If you are a regular attender here, if you don't have small children, don't have to carry a bunch of stuff into the building, and are in good health, try parking as far away from the front door as possible on Sunday morning so that others who need better access might have the close spots.
- If you see someone who appears new here, greet that person warmly. If they look uncertain, help them find where they need to go.
- If you see someone who seems sad or upset, take the time to be with them, listen to them, pray with them.
- If you find out that someone is in need, take inventory of what you have that might help them out.

It is tempting to live to be served. But Jesus calls us in another direction. He calls us to aspire not to be served, but to serve.

Christians never grow to the point where they don't need to serve anymore. No, the more we grow, the more we serve. It is the most mature Christian who serves most willingly, most joyfully, most menially.

Service establishes our credibility as a Jesus follower. After all, if He wasn't "too good" to wash feet, neither are we.

Conclusion:

The last extended session Jesus had with His disciples began with a foot-washing that proved His passion...

...that we know how to restore intimacy with Him after we stumble, fall into sin, and get our feet dirty: BY CONFESSION.

...that we learn the essential grace Jesus modeled: SERVANTHOOD.