

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“A True Valentine-type of Love”
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Sunday, February 14, 2021

Sometimes people don't know how to show love to one another. E.g., I recall reading in a marriage book about a couple that was going through some troubles and sought out counseling. She said he never showed her affection or would tell her much that he loved her. He said he did not understand her and her dissatisfaction because he did indeed love her— so why did he have to be very expressive of it? This went back and forth until finally there was a revelation. The counselor asked him how he showed her he loved her. He said that on cold winter mornings before she went to work (she lived in the north) he would scrape off the snow and ice off her windshield and warm her car up for her before she went to work. He did acts of selfless service for her because that was the way he showed love. I.e., his love language was acts of service. When his wife realized that, a light bulb went off in her head and she got it— and it helped her understand her husband a lot better and appreciate him. It was a Valentine-type of love moment for both of them. Sometimes we don't know how to show love to each other— whether we are married or family members or friends or members of the church family. Jesus reminds us how to do it today.

READ John 13:1-20 (pp. 107-108)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just given a summary of His public teaching, and now He is focusing on His final moments on instructions to His disciples.

READ vv 1-5. “Jesus realizes that His time on earth is short, so He decides to show them love in a concrete way. Cf. Matthew 4:18-19; 21:18-22.” Have you ever had a good teacher? E.g., I recall in the eighth grade we got a new teacher at Ecole Classique named Mr. Louapre, and he taught me algebra. His first day in class he was very stern and demanded that we respect him or we would be in trouble. By the time that first class was over we were shaking in our boots! But then the calmer, more fun side came out at the school year progressed, and he ended up being one of my favorite teachers. We would do work problems in algebra, and we had to put the problems we did on the board for everyone to inspect. And I recall one work problem involved fish, and he went to the board to work it and he would draw this silly fish on the board that sent me laughing. He had a way of making the problems fun and concrete, and that helped me a lot. You have probably—I hope—had a teacher like that, one who could really communicate what you needed to learn. Jesus was like that. He had a reputation for being a good teacher, and people came from large areas to listen to Him. He could be a very concrete, relevant teacher. READ Luke 6:17-19. We see His teaching prowess in such places as Matthew 4:18-19, where he sees Simon Peter and his brother Andrew fishing, and He tells them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people.” In Matthew 21:18-22 Jesus sees a fig tree without fruit and He curses it, and it withers, and this is seen as an acted parable on the lack of spiritual fruit of Jerusalem and the judgment which will come to her.

READ vv 6-17. “Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet was not only an act of humility, but also a lesson in discipleship. Cf. Mark 10:31,41-45; Luke 22:24-27; 1 Peter 5:1-5. ‘Here the point is unmistakable: if their Lord had not thought it beneath his dignity to perform a menial service for them, why should they think it beneath them to do the like for one another?’ (F.F. Bruce, *John*, p. 286).” Jesus’

footwashing of the disciples' feet is an act of their inner cleaning by Jesus, where they have a part of Him and His ministry. It is a pointer to His cross, by which we are all made clean. And it is an example the disciples are to follow, as humble discipleship. Feet were notorious for being dirty in the ancient world, with feet exposed to everything as people walked. And feet can get into some messy things! E.g., I recall my lesson in that when I was a boy and we were visiting my Mom's parents in Tennessee. My grandfather, whom we called Daddy Billy, had a lot of cows and land, and were walking through the cow pasture with him. My Mom told me and my sisters to be sure not to step in cow dung, and I am proud to say that I managed to stay away from cow dung. But do you know who ended up stepping in it? My Mom! So when we got back to the house, guess whom my Dad asked to clean my Mom's shoes. Me!! Yuck! The injustice of it all! I voiced an appeal to my Dad, but he was convinced that I was the man for the job. So I sat on the back steps and cleaned out the remnants of the dung out of every groove of her tennis shoe. No one needs to convince me— feet can step in some stinky things— especially if someone is walking in sandals! Now, sometimes churches have special, formal ceremonies where people at churches take off their shoes and they wash each other's feet. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce thinks, however, that this misses Jesus' point (*ibid.*, pp. 284-285). I agree. Washing feet is a good thing to do, but Jesus' point is that we are to be servants of one another, even in the things we might find beneath us— even repulsive. Cleaning others' shoes, cleaning the bathroom and toilet, or just doing something no one else wants to do but needs to be done. Are we the first to volunteer for such tasks? E.g., I recall a minister with whom I was working really was a good example in this. The church was getting ready to have a special occasion and people were cleaning things up, and some people were standing around talking— like me!— and all of a sudden I saw out of the corner of my eye the pastor vacuuming the carpet— which I thought was a great servant-like example, and made me wonder why I was

standing around talking to people! E.g., I also recall when I was in high school I went to a summer camp for about a week, and something happened that made me deeply impressed with one of the counselors there. We were playing some game at night and I had my retainer in my mouth, and in one particular game I was required to eat something, but I could not with my retainer, and I said so. One of the women counselors saw my struggle and out of the kindness in her heart wanted me to participate in the game, and said to me, “Here, I’ll hold your retainer while you get in that game” and she held out her hand, and I took out my retainer from the roof of my mouth with all its saliva and placed it in her bare hand, and she was totally cool about it! That is what Jesus would have done. READ vv 14-15. This is reflected in all the gospels, and one of most historically secure teaching of Jesus. In Mark 10:45 He said that the Son of Man did not come to be serve, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. READ 1 Peter 5:1-5.

READ vv 18-20. “What is striking about this event is that Jesus washed the feet of friend and foe! Matthew 5:43-45; Psalm 41:1-13, especially v 9 (literally, ‘made his heal great against me’).” But this is typical of Jesus— He was someone who taught we are to love our enemies. READ Matthew 5:43-47. This marks us as different in the world, for sure; more precisely, this marks us as Jesus’ disciples. It is a striking text which Jesus cites here from Psalm 41:9; READ. This betrayal by a friend is to that which Jesus is alluding here. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? E.g., I recall someone in college was trying to get into a popular sorority, and she was going through the process and people were friendly to her, and when it came time for the sorority vote on whom they would allow to become a member, she was blackballed, and not let in. And she was very hurt by this. Have you ever been through such an experience? Where someone friendly to you would talk behind your back, gossip about you, do something unkind to you? To some degree I believe we all know what that is like. The comforting thing is, Jesus knows what that is like as well— He knows betrayal. And He is able to

comfort us in our time of need. And He even washed the feet of foes, like Judas—amazing love!

“Whose feet has the Lord called you and me to wash?” Let us be in prayer about that this week, especially as we prepare to enter in the time of lent as we anticipate Good Friday and Easter, as well as we live out Valentine’s Day today! I saw a really neat article in today’s *Times-Picayune New Orleans Advocate* (1D) where there was an interview with Sol and Lois Heiman, who live in Kenner and have been married for 70 years! What’s some advice on how to keep a marriage thriving that long? Sol said, “Consideration for each other is the most important thing. It has to be both ways”.