

Good morning.

He knew where he came from, he knew why he was here, and he knew where he was going. Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he'd come from God and would return to God. So these words introduce us to a very shocking scene that defies all cultural expectations of first century Judaism.

Foot washing. Foot washing was a practical part of the culture where the streets were dusty and dirty in all kinds of disgusting ways. And so before eating, a servant, usually the lowest servant, would kneel down and wash everybody's feet. Well, Jesus and his disciples go into a room for a final meal. Jesus will be arrested and he will die in just a few hours.

As they enter the room, there's no servant. The stuff is there. The water, the basin, the towel, but no servant. I think the disciples start arguing quietly among themselves about who's going to wash feet. I'm not doing it.

I'm not doing it. And so they probably each make a case as to why they shouldn't wash feet, because they're posturing and positioning themselves to who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom. And Peter says, well, I'm the key guy. I'm not washing feet. Judas says, I'm the treasurer.

I'm not washing feet. And so they argue about this, missing the whole point of Jesus kingdom. You know what Jesus does in my imagination? He's watching them kind of shaking his head, watching them just quietly argue among themselves. And as he watches them, he slowly and deliberately gets up and assumes the position of a servant.

John says he takes off his outer robe. He grabs a towel, wraps it around his waist. I think he takes the pitcher and he pours water into the bowl or the basin. And then he kneels down and he, Jesus starts washing feet carefully and lovingly drying those feet with his towel. I'm guessing there was just an absolute stunned silence, broken only by the gentle splashing of water as Jesus washes the dirt off the feet of these guys.

Jesus washes Judas feet, knowing full well that in just a little bit Judas is going to betray him. Jesus starts to wash Peter's feet, and Peter protests. And Jesus pushes back and says, this really needs to happen. And Peter says, okay, let's it happen. After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, do you understand what I was doing?

You call me teacher. And Lord, and you're right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

Now, a little bit later, in this context of John 13 and foot washing, Jesus is going to say something that I believe is the most important thing, the most important thing. And he's going to repeat it in John 15, the most important thing that flows from our relationship with God. And here's what he says in John 13, 34 and 35. So now I'm giving you a new commandment. Love each other.

Just as I've loved you. You should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. So as Jesus continues what's called the final discourse, or these final teachings before he dies, he continues to emphasize the priority of loving one another. We've been focused on John 15 for the last few weeks, talking about flourishing.

And Jesus in that passage, talks about remaining. He literally says it 10 times using the word remain. And it's the idea of staying connected to Jesus. And that connection with Jesus is what enables us and allows us to connect with each other. But the means that governs all of it is love.

Jesus says it like this. In John 15, 9, 12, he says, I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I've told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy.

Yes, your joy will overflow. This is my commandment. Love each other in the same way I have loved you. And then in verse 17, he says, this is my command. Love each other.

It's pretty plain, isn't it? Loving Jesus. And loving each other, he says, is a source of overflowing joy. He also says something that really intriguing. He says that when we love each other, it helps us fulfill the mission of Jesus, which is ultimately about making disciples and winning the world for and to Jesus.

Jesus said in Luke 19, I came to seek and save the lost. Is this mic? Is it working mode? Okay. He says, I came to seek and save the lost.

Remember, in chapter 13, in the context of washing feet, Jesus says, if you love each other, you will prove to the world that you are my disciples. And he says the same thing kind of in John 17, where he's talking about unity and Jesus is praying and he prays for us. And he says, this unity can only come by loving one another. And listen to his prayer. He says, I pray that they talking about us will all be

one, just as you and I are one, as you are in me, Father, and I am in you.

And may they be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one, I in them, and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love me, love them as much as you love me. So loving each other and uniting and maintaining and keeping that unity that we're given through our common connection to Jesus, that's at the very top of God's priority list for us. That's at the top that we would be connected to Jesus and connected to each other.

And it's all with a view of bringing more and more people into relationship with God. And I believe this is what Jesus is talking about in John 15, when he says, you will bear much fruit, produce fruit. I think he's talking about making disciples. So in John 15, we've seen it several times. Jesus is a vine, we are the branches.

It's plural. It's plural. We are connected to Jesus, and this becomes the means for connecting with one another. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. In the vineyard, the branches are intertwined.

Following Christ is not a solo effort. And so the intertwined vines allow the the vine to be strong and it allows for good growth and beautiful fruit. Now, there's another way of looking at the same idea of being connected to Jesus and connected to each other. And that idea is presented often in the New Testament. It's the idea that the church is the body of Christ, so Jesus is the head and we are the body.

And so in that metaphor, it's the same as this one, that we are connected to Jesus. And because we're connected to the head, we're connected to each other. And again, following Christ is not a solo effort. In First Corinthians 12, Paul talks extensively about the church as the body of Christ. And he kind of uses some humor in there too.

It's really a fascinating chapter. And he says this in verses 12 through 14 of chapter 12, 1 Corinthians, he says, the human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some are Jews, Gentiles, slave free, but we have all been baptized into one body. By one Spirit.

And we all share the same spirit. So we talk a lot. When we're baptized. We reenact the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. And we see language in Scripture.

It says, when we're baptized, we're baptized into Christ. But here Paul says, you're not only baptized into Christ, in a sense, you're baptized into the church. You're baptized into the body of Christ.

Now, we retain our individual identity, but we also become a part of something that's much bigger, much greater, much more important. We are individual parts of the same body, which is the Body of Christ.

And as the body of Christ, we are called basically to be the second Incarnation. We're called to just continue and carry on the ministry of Jesus. So we become his eyes, we become his heart, we become his hands, his feet. We are called to literally carry on what Jesus started in ministering to other people, to show people the love of God, compassionately seeking the lost and caring for them. You know, the Corinthian Church was really messed up.

If you read it, they were really divided up. They were divided, not united. And some thought they were superior. Others felt inferior. And Paul says, listen, there's just no room for any of that.

Come on. There's no room for any of that. The church is the body of Christ, and everyone and every part is important. So Paul, he just takes on this idea and he says, listen, we are different. We are different.

We have different personalities, we have different ideas, we have different opinions. We have different approaches. You name it, we have differences. And Paul says, understand that. And understand there is no room for a superiority complex, and there's no room for an inferiority complex.

And then he imagines that there's a conversation between body parts. That's kind of funny. The foot says, well, I'm not a hand, so I guess I'm not that important. And then he says, the eye says to the head. The eye says, I'm sorry.

The ear says to the eye, well, I'm not an eye, so I just can't see myself being very valuable.

Paul says, listen, your body doesn't do that. He says, the eye doesn't say to the hand, I don't need you. And his point is that it doesn't matter who you are or what part you play. You are a part of the body, and you are important. All of us have an important part to play.

And he sums it up in verse 27. He says, all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a part of it. I think understanding this is the key to really flourishing. It's the key to thriving. It's the key to experiencing peace, joy and confidence in this world.

It's true, because when we are connected together, we are really aligning ourselves with God's will. We are aligning ourselves with what God wants for us and what we're designed for. So I guess a good practical question is, okay, well, how do we stay connected to Jesus

and to one another, fulfilling the will of God? How can we find our purpose? Well, Paul wraps up that discussion in First Corinthians 12 with some words.

He says, let me show you the most excellent way. Let me show you how to live. Let me show you how to make all this possible. And he just launches right in to a conversation about love. Love, the essence of who God is.

God is love. John tells us in first John, love. The very thing that Jesus commands and demands of us. Love. Love one another.

And Paul says, listen, if you don't have love, you ain't got nothing, really. If you don't have love, you can achieve, you can accomplish, you can do all kinds of wonderful things. But when it's all said and done, it's just really not worth anything. You need love. You need love.

So what is it? What is love and what does it really mean to love one another? Paul just lays it out pretty plainly in 1st Corinthians 13. He says this in verses 4 through 7. Listen, listen to this.

He says, love is patient and kind.

Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It's not irritable. Wish he hadn't said that. It keeps no record of being wrong.

It doesn't rejoice about injustice, but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith. Love is always hopeful and endures through every circumstance.

You know, when you read that, you can say, you know what? Those are the characteristics of God.

And those are the characteristics, God in the flesh. Those are the characteristics of Jesus. I imagine Paul taking a couple guys that are at odds with each other in the Corinthian church. One's Jimmy, one's John. And he sits down with them and he says, alright, boys, you see what love is?

That's what God is. That's what Jesus is. What about you?

Are you guys living this out? Are you patient? Are you kind? Are you boastful? Proud?

Are you keeping records? Wrong. What about it? And then I think, what if I go through those characteristics? Am I patient?

Am I kind? Am I rude? Am I boastful, proud, and so on, so forth. You

know, the Greek word here is agape. You probably have heard before that the Greek has at least.

Well, it's four major words for love and a whole bunch more. So it's very nuanced in the Greek language. But the word here is agape, which is the deepest and the strongest form of love. And this form of love that's predominant in the New Testament, especially here in First Corinthians 13, and the one Jesus asks us to have, it's the word agape. And it just means to make a decision, to make a commitment to another person, to love selflessly no matter what.

So in other words, it's unconditional. I will love you. No matter what you do to me, I will still love you. And this is the love of God. No matter what we do, God loves us.

And Jesus says, this is the love you have to have for one another. This is what I want you to do. It's a rugged commitment, this love. It's a rugged commitment to others to be with them, to be for them, not against them, and to say, together, let's grow. Together, let's grow to be more like Jesus.

This is what Jesus wants for his body. This is what he wants for us. This is what we're called to be and called to do. Now, I don't know about you, but I find it very challenging, especially in individualistic culture. Especially in the culture right now, it's just a lot easier to not do any of this.

And here's what I tend to do. I just tend to isolate. I'll just stay away from it all. It's just too much. And part of it is people stay away from love because it hurts.

You get hurt, you get burnt, and it's just so risky. CS Lewis, in a book called the Four Loves, which talks about the four different languages or four words for love, he says, this, which I really love. He says, to love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal.

Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. Your heart will change.

It will not be broken, but it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love at all is to be Vulnerable.

The reward of loving is worth the risk. Loving others as Jesus has loved us places us right in the heart of God. And it's where we find mercy and grace, peace, joy and confidence. So then we say, what does

it mean to love one another? You've probably heard that there are 60 something passages in the New Testament that say one another.

15, 16, 17 of those are love one another. It says it that many times. He says, love one another, love one another. But there's also one another passages that say something else that I think are just all informed by the idea of love and really are a reflection of love. So I imagine Paul still talking to Jimmy and John and says, all right, let me tell you what it means to love one another.

You know, what the characteristics are, but what does it mean in real life? And so he said, it means be devoted, devoted to one another, honor one another, live in harmony with one another, be at peace with one another, accept one another, be like minded, forgive one another, be patient with one another, encourage one another, pray, don't lie to one another, speak the truth, don't grumble against each other, don't slander, bear each other's burdens. Serve, love one another. So Jimmy and John heard that and they later formed a sandwich shop. I think they reconcile their differences.

Sorry.

So when we live like this, devoted, loving one another, honoring one another, respecting one another, when we live like this, we're reflecting the love of God, we're reflecting the love of Jesus. What a difference it makes in our marriages, what a difference it makes in our families, what a difference it makes in our relationships at work, and what a difference it makes in the church. And I see it here, I see it here. When we fulfill the desire and the prayer of Jesus, his prayer for unity, his prayer to love one another, we're demonstrating to the world that there's a better way to live. There's a way to live where we truly love one another and we can flourish.

Because we are right smack dab in the middle of the heart of God and His will for us. As we think about communion this morning, I want to point you to First John. I had like three pages about First John had to cut it all out, except this. When John writes his little letter, he's in Ephesus and he's writing this little letter, he just infuses it with love. He loves his people and he's so aware of God's love and what it means.

And I want to challenge you to read First John this afternoon. But here, just this Little snippet from chapter four. As we prepare to take communion, he says, dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God.

For God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and

sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

And then he adds in verse 19, we love each other because he loved us first. So we take communion this morning. I want to challenge me and I want to challenge you a little bit. I want to challenge us to think about love and your relationship with God. I want you to allow yourself to be loved by God and I want you to think about how we reflect that.

So during this time, ask God to reveal to you what he wants you to know about his love.

And then maybe. Do you need to do something? Is there someone or something that you need to address?

Is there some forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation need to take place? I don't know. I just know this love command is strong and pervasive and I need to examine myself once again to see where I stand. So let me pray. Father, thank you for making it really clear about what love is.

And it's demonstrated on the cross. It shows us how ugly sin is and how wonderful your love is. God, we know that you want us to love each other as we have been loved, and that is unconditionally. We mess it up so often we ask for your forgiveness, Father. As we take this bread and we take this juice, we're reminded of what true love is, that Jesus laid down his life for us and help us to have that kind of commitment to others.

We thank you in Jesus name, Amen.

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