

TWO IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCES WE BELONG TO JESUS (John 12:1-5, 12-17, 34-35)

A man showed up at a psychiatrist's office. As he walked through the office door, he was wearing a fried egg on top of his head. A strip of bacon was dangling from each ear. A sausage link was hanging from each nostril. In a concerned voice, he addressed the psychiatrist. He said, "Doc, I need to talk to you. It's about my brother."

All too often we interact with Scripture in a detached way. As we are listening to a sermon, we think, "So-and-so needs to hear this." As we are reading a text, we say to ourselves, "My co-worker, my neighbor needs to read this." We walk away without that truth having penetrated our own heart. We all face the real danger of not allowing the Spirit of God to deal with us personally.

It has been a long time since I last heard it, but as a child, I remember singing the old spiritual, "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

It is my prayer that today, each of us would focus on what God has to say to us personally. I challenge you to pray, "Lord, what do you want me to know? What do you want me to do? Speak to me today. Help me to follow You."

When I was growing up, several times I heard a question that is wish to pose to you. "If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

In my view, attending church services is no more than weak, circumstantial evidence. I've known people who attended worship every Sunday, and they were as mean as a polecat. They showed little evidence of being changed by the gospel. What evidence is there in your life that really indicates you know and follow Jesus?

We are going to look at several verses all within John 13. In this chapter we find Jesus acting, Jesus teaching, and Jesus commanding. If we distill those verses, we can find two irrefutable evidences that we really do belong to Him, that we are His disciples.

Let's read what Jesus did and then what Jesus said about what He did. Look with me at John 13:1-5 and 12-17.

Notice Exhibit A.

It Is Clear We Belong to Jesus if We Follow His Model of Serving

Let's take a moment to consider where Jesus and His disciples are and what has brought them to this point. In John 12, Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and was greeted and welcomed by great crowds of well-wishers. Some were fair-weather fans. Some were devoted disciples. Some were just curious onlookers. There were some other men who stood apart from the crowd looking on the scene as it played out before them. I picture them as having arms folded or hands upon the hips, watching with disapproval mixed with fear, no doubt. These men were Pharisees, religious leaders. They saw their influence waning; their power and position being threatened. They had already decided that Jesus must go; Jesus must die.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday. Unlike the gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—John overlooks the other events that took place during that week, and he goes straight to Thursday evening.

From John's perspective, Jesus and the Twelve observed an early Passover meal. A room had been loaned to them for their use. We call it the Upper Room. It is likely the same room where the 120 followers of Jesus held a ten-day prayer meeting. On the tenth day, the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon His Church with great power.

In the late 1400's, Leonardo da Vinci painted one of the world's most well-known works of art. We call it "The Last Supper." You've seen it. Jesus is seated in the middle, behind a long, rectangular table. All of the disciples are seated on the same side of the table to His left and right. No one eats like that. Jesus and His disciples certainly didn't.

Sitting at a table to eat would have been a European thing to do, but the custom of the Jews in the ancient Near-East in the first century would have been to recline at a low u-shaped table with the table just above the floor. You would lie on your left side, support yourself with your left hand and eat with the right hand.

The places of honor would have been to the left and right of Jesus. It appears that John was to the right of Jesus, and Judas was to his left. I imagine Peter and maybe others saw the seating arrangement, and they weren't too happy.

Luke tells us about something that happened that night which the other gospel writers omit. A disagreement broke out among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. This is a complete guess on my part, but maybe that argument was occasioned by the seating arrangement. Luke tells us, Jesus said, "Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the one who serves." He went on to say, "I am among you as one who serves."

We are not told, but I would like to think that is the point at which John picks up in John 13 and tells us about Jesus serving His disciples by washing their feet.

It is hard for us to understand both the significance and the importance of foot-washing. Unlike in our day, in Jesus' day, no one walked about wearing socks and closed-toe shoes. There were not paved sidewalks, and there were precious few paved roads. Everywhere you went was dusty when dry and muddy when wet.

It was customary when entering a house to eat, to have your feet washed. To not do so would have resulted in both an unsanitary and unpleasant mess. Since we are not accustomed to foot-washing, one preacher looked for a modern-day equivalent. The best he could come up with was public restrooms. How many of you avoid public restrooms if you can? Everyone of us has come upon public restrooms that were absolutely nasty. That's what you would get if everyone reclined at the table with unwashed feet. Who wants to eat a meal in a room that smells like a nasty, public restroom?

The custom was for the person with the lowest social standing to get a basin of water and a towel and wash the feet of everyone. If there were servants in the home, the lowest servant would have that task.

It was unlikely that there were any actual servants present at the Last Supper. None of the disciples could make a case for them being the greatest and still volunteer to wash the feet of his fellow disciples. Jesus, who was, without argument, the greatest took it upon

Himself to wash the feet of His students. He took off His robe, adorned Himself with a towel, grabbed a basin of water and washed 24 feet that were not His own, including the feet of the one who would betray Him.

What was His motive for doing so? Sure, Jesus was wanted to teach His disciples an important lesson, but there was a more, foundational motivation than just that. Look at the latter half of v. 1. John used the word *loved* twice in that second half of v. 1. Jesus was motivated by love.

It occurs to me, you can serve without loving, but you cannot love without serving. The two go together. Love and service are two sides of the same coin. Wherever you find love, service will always be present.

Also, you can't just serve in word only. It would be do good to look upon a person with dirty feet and say to him, "Be washed and walk in cleanness." No. Someone must get down, kneel on the floor, apply water to the feet, and scrub gently between the toes. That is what Jesus did. He did not serve symbolically. He served actually. And if we are to follow the model of Jesus in serving, we will serve in deed and not in word only.

That is essentially what James wrote. Listen to James 2:15-17, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" James added, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead."

We could change the word *works* to *service*. Faith without service is dead. I would also say, "Love without service is not true love." It may be sentimentality. It may be warm feelings. Without tangible, actual, practical deeds of service, what you call love is not true love. Real love does something to meet the real needs of the one he or she loves. Love compels us to serve the object of our affection.

You might object by arguing, "But how can I love and serve someone I don't even know?" Well, you serve them because of the One you really do know. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). That means, when we fail to serve someone, we are failing to serve Jesus. In short, we serve others because we love Him.

While love necessitates service, Jesus also taught that leadership necessitates service. Look again at vv. 3-4 and vv. 12-15. Consider also what Jesus said in Mark 10:42-45.

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Great leaders are not the ones who are served the most; they are the ones who serve the most. In God's Kingdom, real leaders are not those who lord it over the ones they lead. Instead, they come underneath and support and encourage and serve the ones they lead.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus served both His disciples and the crowds that followed Him. He served them by teaching them, comforting them, encouraging them,

listening to them, feeding them, healing them, and ultimately by dying for them.

Practically, how can we best serve others? **One way we can serve others is to offer them a listening ear.** Every day, people pay professionals to listen to them. Most counselors rarely give advice to their clients. They don't tell them what to do. They mostly listen. If you want to serve people, listen to them. Ask questions, and let them talk. Don't try to top their story or even tell your story, unless they ask. Just listen. I can't overemphasize how important that is. You don't have to fix them. You don't have to solve their problems. Just listen. Listen compassionately and non-judgmentally.

In addition to offering a listening ear, **another way to serve people is to lend a helping hand.** If you can do something another person can't do or needs help doing, offer to help them. It might be housework, or yardwork, or minor repairs, or a drive to the store or the doctor's office, or anything else that helps. To serve we must be willing to be inconvenienced and be willing to give of our time to help people with our expertise and abilities.

To serve others, offer a listening ear; lend a helping hand. **Finally, speak a caring word.** Speak kindly to everyone you meet, even to the one who barks at you. Be courteous. Be complimentary. Use your words to encourage someone who is having a tough time. Catch someone doing the right thing and make a good example of them. Brag about the great job they are doing. "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life," says Proverbs 15:4. One important way to speak a caring word is to restore those who have fallen. Let them know they still matter, and they are still loved.

To follow the model of Jesus, we must get involved in the lives of people. We can't serve from a distance. We must draw close. That is what Jesus did. What Jesus did that night illustrates what He did by coming to this world. Jesus took off His robe of glory and wrapped Himself in human flesh. Instead of pouring water into a basin, He poured out His blood at Calvary. Instead of wiping our feet, He wiped away our sin and made us clean. When Jesus rose after having completed the task God gave Him to do, He put on the robe of His robe of glory and returned to the Father's House

I don't know if it is still there, but at one time, there was a hand-painted sign that hung over the door into the worship center of St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico. There was only one entrance into the sanctuary, and the sign above the door read, "Servant's Entrance."

When you enter into the Church of Jesus Christ, you become a servant. As you serve, it becomes apparent to all that you belong to Jesus.

Let's look at Exhibit B, another irrefutable piece of evidence that you are a follower of Jesus.

It Is Clear We Belong to Jesus if We Obey His Mandate to Love

We've looked at Jesus acting and Jesus teaching. Now, let's look at Jesus commanding. Notice vv. 34-35. Jesus calls us to love one another, and if we do so, Jesus says that's how people will know we are truly His disciples. Consider what Jesus did not say. He did not say that everyone will know we belong to Jesus . . .

- If we go to Church Sunday and Wednesday.
- If we sing in the choir.
- If we put an “I Love Jesus” bumper sticker on our car.
- If we pray in the restaurant before we eat.
- If we don’t go to “R” rated movies.
- If we wear a cross around our neck and a WWJD bracelet around our wrist.
- If we don’t drink, don’t cuss, don’t chew, don’t dance, and don’t fool around.

No. He didn’t say any of those things. He said everyone would know we are His followers if we would do just one thing—love our Christian brothers and sisters. When a watching world sees Christians fussing, feuding, and fighting, they scratch their heads and wonder if any of us know the Lord. Oh, but when they see us care for one another, minister to one another, and be there for one another, that speaks volumes to them without us having to say a word.

Some of the days prior to Easter have special names. For instance, the Sunday preceding Easter is called Palm Sunday. That commemorates the Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and the people waved palm branches, praised God, and welcomed Jesus. Somewhat oddly, the Friday prior to Easter, the day on which Jesus died, is called Good Friday. In some ways it was a horrible, no good, very bad day; yet, it was the day Jesus paid the penalty of sin and took our place. In that sense, it was good, very good.

The Thursday prior to Easter also has a special name. It is called Maundy Thursday, not Monday Thursday, but *Maundy*. It is the Latin word for *Mandate*. A mandate is a command. On Thursday night, Jesus ate a special dinner with His disciples, and on that night, He issued them a command. He called it a New Command.

Two years ago, Valentine’s Day fell on a Sunday. That Valentine’s Sunday I preached on these two verses from John. I entitled the message, “The Grand Essential.” That is what love is; love within the Church is the grand essential. It is the one thing we cannot do without. We can do without hymnals. We can do without pews. We can do without a building. You can even do without a pastor. For more than a year before I became your pastor, you didn’t have a pastor, and yet we were still a church. We can’t do without love. Oh, we can go through the motions of being a church, but without love we aren’t the real deal. We are just a cheap imitation of a real church, unworthy of being called the Body of Christ in our community. Love is the Grand Essential.

In that message I preached 2-plus years ago, I commented on the fact that Jesus called this a new commandment. In what sense was it new? The Greeks had two words for *new*. One meant *new in time*. It meant “lately sprung up.” That was not the word John used for what Jesus said. The responsibility to love one another was not something unheard of because the Jewish Scriptures taught that we are to love our neighbors, and Jesus said that was one of the two great commands.

Jesus used a different word for new. He used a word that meant “new in experience.” It was fresh, not outworn. We cannot outwear the command to love one another. It never goes out of date. Your clothes can and will go out of style. Before they go out of style,

they might wear out.

The command to love one another never goes out of style, and that command never becomes worn out. The command to love one another is perpetually new.

Just as Jesus is our model for serving, Jesus is our pattern for loving. Jesus said, “Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” If we are to love others the way Jesus has loved us, we must consider how Jesus has loved us.

Jesus has loved us sacrificially. It cost Jesus to love us. Jesus paid a price. He redeemed us at great cost to Himself. The NLT translates 1 Peter 1:18-19 in this way:

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

To love others that way Jesus has loved us does not mean that we must spill our blood for one another. It does mean that we cannot love one another casually and without commitment or cost. True love gives. It gives of time and of treasure and of self.

We are to love the way a mother loves her children—fiercely, with abandon, and sacrificially, just like Jesus.

So, let me ask you, if Christianity were outlawed in our country and you were arrested for being a follower of Jesus, would the state be able to gather enough evidence to convict you? They could examine your tax records to see what and how much you gave to the local church and other Christian ministries. If you use one, they could use the GPS in your cellphone to see how often you frequent a house of worship. But the most powerful evidence that you have sold out to Jesus is that you serve like Him and you love like Him. If you do those two things: Case Closed! You are a Christian!

Now, if I were arrested for being a Christian, I think I would tell the Judge, “There is no need to hold a trial. I plead, “Guilty as charged.” I might add, “Your honor, I see no reason to throw myself on the mercy of the court because I have already received mercy from the Judge of all the Earth. Let me tell you about His Son.”

Jesus gave us a model to follow and a mandate to obey. Let’s follow the model and obey the mandate.