

Know Who We Are

Loving the Unlovable Series, March 12 & 13 | John 13:1-11

Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

TODAY WE BEGIN A NEW SERIES, "LOVING THE UNLOVABLE"

We are looking at John chapter 13, the first chapter of Jesus' Last Supper Discourse.

These are the words Jesus said to his disciples over a meal the night before he was crucified.

John chapters 13-17 are some of the richest words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament. In these chapters, Jesus reveals the heart of God, the nature of his ministry, and the mysteries of discipleship. This is critical material!

One by one over the next several years, we will examine these chapters in the weeks leading up to Resurrection Weekend. This year, we begin with John chapter 13.

In John 13, Jesus commands us to love one another.

Jesus sets an example for us in how to love one another.

Then Jesus commands us to follow his example of practical, sacrificial love.

Jesus' command to love one another includes people like Judas.

In John 13, Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, immediately jumps to the foreground.

Judas Iscariot is the disciple who betrayed Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus shows practical, sacrificial love even to Judas! Knowing who Judas was and what he was going to do, Jesus made room in his inner circle for Judas; Jesus spent time with, taught, then served Judas.

Judas! He's about as unlovable of a person as history includes. Jesus loves unlovable people like Judas and commands us to do the same.

When I speak about the "unlovable," whom do I mean?

Sometimes the "unlovable" ones are the betrayers like Judas.

Sometimes they are the enemies who oppose us.

Sometimes they are the people we fear.

Sometimes they are the people who try our patience and make life difficult.

To call them "unlovable" doesn't imply that it is impossible to love them.

Instead, it implies that we question whether they are deserving of love or not.

To call them "unlovable" means that loving them does not come easily.

Murder hornets are definitely "unlovable."

Murder hornets are large—nearly two inches long, brightly colored, and menacing looking.

They were spotted in Washington State in 2019. Efforts are still underway to stop them.

They are able to kill an entire wasp colony which doesn't sound altogether bad. But they are also predators of honeybees (which we need). Plus, their stings are incredibly painful, and they are capable of killing humans.

Murder hornets are definitely "unlovable."

Who else is "unlovable?"

Difficult neighbors, family members, and co-workers definitely have to feel "unlovable."

If someone ever tried to undermine you at work, displace you in your circle of friends, or embarrass you in your family, then they probably seem "unlovable."

If you've ever been the victim of a crime, the criminal must seem "unlovable."

People from the other side of the aisle politically probably seem "unlovable" at times.

Lost people who behave in lost ways in the lost world probably seem "unlovable" at times.

How do we love the "unlovable?"

If we're bluntly honest, we may not be sure we want to love the unlovable.

Certainly, we doubt our ability to love the unlovable; it isn't easy.

If we're going to love the unlovable, we need to know how, and we want to know why.

For the answers to both, we turn to Jesus and John 13 for answers. Let's examine this thesis today:

When we know who we are in Christ, we can love the unlovable.

JESUS LOVED AN UNLOVABLE ONE

Jesus gathered together with his closest disciples for the Last Supper.

People were gathering in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.

Jesus and his disciples were celebrating a meal together in an upper room.

John 13:1-5 shows us what happened early in the meal:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Someone needed to do something.

The custom in that day was for people to eat meals like this reclining on a mat or couch.

The table would be in the center, people would recline on one arm around the table.

The roads of that day were used by pedestrians and lots of animals. The roads were dirty and frequently covered with animal waste. Hence, the disciples' feet would be dirty. And smelly.

Frequently the host for such a meal would provide an opportunity to wash one's feet. There may be a pool or basin of water. There may be a servant to wash feet. Somehow, the feet needed to be washed, but no one was moving.

Jesus acted.

Jesus took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and went from disciple to disciple washing feet.

This was a truly extraordinary step for Jesus to take. Remember, servants washed feet. Sometimes students would wash the feet of teachers as a sign of respect. Here was Jesus, the Teacher and Rabbi, washing the feet of his students. What humility!

Jesus loved and served his disciples by washing their feet, prefiguring the way he would love and serve us all by going to the cross to pay the price for our sin.

Jesus loved Judas, the unlovable one, by washing his feet.

Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. Still, Jesus chose Judas to follow him anyway.

In John chapter 6, Jesus said out loud that he already knew that one of the disciples would betray him. John makes it clear in **John 6:70-71** that Jesus was speaking about Judas:

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.

Before John 13, Satan had already lodged the temptation in Judas' heart.

Still, Jesus washed Judas' feet. Is that not an amazing act on Jesus' part? He willingly washed the feet of his betrayer. He washed the feet of the unlovable disciple.

Principle 1: Because Jesus washed Judas' feet, we know we ought to love the unlovable.

Jesus is setting the example for us here.

Jesus is showing us that we ought to love one another practically and self-sacrificially.

And if Jesus washed Judas' feet, then we know what we must do. We must love the unlovable in practical, self-sacrificing kinds of ways just as Jesus did.

But how did Jesus do that? It isn't easy, and we struggle!

JESUS KNEW WHO HE WAS

Jesus knew his time.

In verse 1, John says that Jesus knew his hour had come.

By that, John means that there was a right time, an appointment, that had arrived.

John says that it was time for Jesus to depart and be with his Father.

Chronologically, it was time for Jesus to die and rise again.

For the disciples, it was time to hear and see who Jesus truly was.

Jesus knew his time.

Jesus knew his Father.

Jesus repeatedly referred to God as his Father. In **John 10:30** Jesus made a claim that scandalized the Jewish religious leaders. He claimed, *"I and the Father are one."*

Furthermore, Jesus repeatedly attested that he came from the Father and would be returning to the Father. In **John 16:28** Jesus said,

"I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

Jesus knew his Father, where he came from, and where he was going.

Jesus knew his possessions.

In some ways, Jesus knew that all things belonged to him. As God the Son, he had all things.

In addition, Jesus' possessions included his people, his disciples. In **John 6:44**, Jesus himself claims his people as a possession given to him by the Father:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Verse 1 said that Jesus loved his people. Jesus knew his possessions.

Jesus knew his role.

Back to verse 1, Jesus' role is clear. Having love his people, he loved them to the end.

He loved them to the end of his time with them, never giving up on them.

He loved them to the fullest extent of love, not only washing their feet but dying to pay the price for their sin and rising victorious over sin, death, and evil that they might be forgiven, reconciled, adopted, sanctified, resurrected, and glorified.

This is why he took on human flesh and came to the world; this is his role. Jesus knew his role.

Principle 2: Because Jesus knew who he was, he was able to love the unlovable.

Judas wasn't the first unlovable person Jesus loved practically. He loved plenty of people we would consider unlovable, like tax collectors, revolutionaries, and lepers.

Judas wasn't even the only unlovable person in the room. Every person in the room with Jesus that night was a sinner in open rebellion against God, by all rights objects of God's wrath.

However, Jesus knew himself. His identity (who he was) meant he did love the unlovable.

How could Jesus love Judas? How could Jesus love the unlovable? Knowing ourselves may be a key to loving the unlovable practically and sacrificially.

PETER HEARD WHO HE WAS

In John 13:6-11, Peter came face to face with his own identity:

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

Peter didn't understand what Jesus was doing.

He was confused by Jesus' move to wash his feet and questioned his rabbi.

Jesus confirmed the appropriateness of Peter's question at least—Peter could not understand.

However, Jesus told Peter that he would understand later. In just a few verses Jesus would explain the act of washing their feet; they were to do themselves as Jesus had done for them.

What he really meant, though, was that Peter would only understand this gesture and this kind of love after experiencing the cross and resurrection.

Later that evening, as is recorded in **John 14:26**, Jesus told Peter and the others gathered together in the upper room that the Holy Spirit would come into their lives, cause them to remember all these events and the words that Jesus was saying, and give them the understanding that they then lacked. Jesus said:

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

In another grand gesture, Peter said, "No." The Master would never wash the student's feet. Jesus responded that if Peter didn't allow him to wash Peter's feet, then Peter would have no share in Jesus.

Jesus was saying that if he doesn't wash a person, then they don't get salvation. As Jesus said in **John 3:5**,

... "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Peter didn't understand everything that Jesus meant, but he got the message.

Peter followed up by asking Jesus to wash his hands and head as well.

You can appreciate Peter's thinking process. If washing his feet meant staying with Jesus, then he wanted more! He wanted his hands washed, symbolizing the cleansing of his deeds. He wanted his head washed, symbolizing the cleansing of his thoughts.

However, again, Peter missed the point. Jesus clarified.

Peter and the others heard that they were already clean!

Of course, Jesus had not yet died and risen again.

However, the disciples already had begun putting their faith in Jesus.

Furthermore, they had already heard Jesus' Word, and Jesus' Word had already begun to cleanse them from the inside.

Jesus made what he meant clear later that night when he said the words recorded in **John 15:3**,

"Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."

Consequently, Peter really just needed his feet cleaned because they were dirty. His soul cleansing was already underway.

The cleansing was underway for every person in the room. Every person, except for Judas.

Peter had a jaw-dropping lesson in who he was in Christ.

The Word of God was cleansing him.

The Son of God was serving him by washing his feet.

The Son of God was preparing to love him to the fullest by dying to pay the price for his sin and rising again to bring him new and eternal life.

Everything was beginning to change for Peter.

WHEN WE KNOW WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST, WE CAN LOVE THE UNLOVABLE.

C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* reminds us that our identity in Christ shapes our behavior.

C.S. Lewis set *The Chronicles of Narnia* largely in a fantasy world of talking animals and magic.

The heroes of the first book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, are two brothers and two sisters who stumble into the magical land and the middle of a battle between good and evil.

After an encounter that feels a great deal like being saved by Jesus, the four children reign over the land as kings and queens. Being kings and queens in this magical land brings out the best in each one of these children. They *behave* like kings and queens.

After decades as kings and queens, at the end of the first book, they return to this real world they came from. They instantly transform back into children but with muscle memory and practice being kings and queens.

How should they behave here? They live restlessly remembering who they are in Narnia.

When we become followers of Jesus, our identity changes like that of the children in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

We learn that, first and foremost, we are citizens of another realm, the Kingdom of God.

In the Kingdom of God, we are part of the royal family—sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

In this realm, we are ambassadors of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

That identity shapes everything about how we behave here and now.

When we meet Christ, like Peter we learn more fully what our identity means.

Like all the disciples in the Upper Room, we are the ones cleansed by Jesus' word and loved to the end. We are the ones for whom Jesus died and rose again.

When we repent and accept Jesus into our lives, we are forgiven of our sin.

Our rebellion against God is over, and we have been reconciled to him.

After being adopted as sons and daughters of God, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and are being sanctified.

Our future includes being resurrected, glorified, and living with God forever.

When we meet Christ, we learn that we are LOVED in the fullest sense.

The most important questions about who we are have been answered.

Again, our identity shapes everything about how we behave here and now.

Apart from Christ, we have a very difficult time loving the unlovable.

Apart from Christ, we worry about getting and holding stuff for ourselves.

What we're really seeking is to be loved rather than to love.

But in Christ, all that anxiety melts away to be replaced by confidence.

By now our final principle should be clear:

Principle 3: When we know who we are in Christ, we can love the unlovable.

In Christ, we know who we are.

We know where we come from, where we're going, who our Father is, and what belongs to us.

We have a much clearer sense of our role and purpose in life.

With that kind of confidence, we can put on a towel, take a basin of water, and wash dirty feet.

When we know who we are in Christ, we can love the unlovable.