

Expect Tough Days

Loving the Unlovable Series, March 26 & 27, 2022 (WOW #2) | John 13:12-20

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WHEN WE LOVE THE UNLOVABLE, WE SHOULD EXPECT TOUGH DAYS

In week one of this series, Jesus washed Judas' feet.

Jesus gathered in an upper room with his disciples for one last meal before his crucifixion.

As the disciples gathered, their feet were dirty from walking the streets in sandals.

Normally, the host provided a way for guests to wash their feet. A wealthy host would provide a servant to wash feet. However, no one rushed to do what needed to be done.

Jesus took off his outer garment, wrapped a towel around his waist, grabbed a basin of water, and went from disciple to disciple washing and drying their feet.

It was an act of love—practical, sacrificial love.

Jesus even washed the feet of Judas Iscariot.

Judas is someone we might call “unlovable.”

Jesus included Judas in his tight circle and shared his life, teachings, and meals with him.

Then Judas took money from the Jewish religious leaders in exchange for guiding Jesus' enemies to find him at night, so that they might arrest him away from the support of the crowds.

Judas betrayed the Son of God to his death.

That makes him one of history's great villains. We can pretty easily call him “unlovable.”

Who else is “unlovable?”

Strictly speaking, no one is unlovable if by that we mean that it is impossible to love them.

However, we all have people we don't want to love or are difficult to love.

It's difficult to love our enemies, people who have hurt us, and even people who bother us.

This week we probably need to add to the list. It's frequently difficult to love non-Christians. They are so different from us. Loving them can be a challenge.

In fact, it can be difficult to love anyone who is different from us. It's uncomfortable. We don't know what to do or say. We are afraid of being rejected or worse.

During World Outreach Week, we have to say that there are times when we find it difficult to love people around the world, even the people from around the world who live near us. They are different from us, and it can be difficult to love people who are different.

I learned that we should expect tough days when we love the unlovable while handing out free lightbulbs.

In 2008 when I was starting a new church, lots of people were replacing old, energy inefficient light bulbs with new, energy-efficient light bulbs. That gave me an idea.

I bought a bunch of energy-efficient light bulbs and devised a flyer to go with them. The flyer had a message about Jesus being the light of the world, plus an invitation to attend our church.

I stood in front of WalMart with a team and offered everyone leaving the store a free light bulb.

Some people took them, thanked me, and looked at the brochure.

Other people took the light bulbs and dropped the brochure in the snow. No problem.

Some people said, "No, thank you." Not sure why. It's just a free light bulb, but no problem.

What really confused me is the few people who got angry. They told me what I could do with my light bulbs with some colorful words. They made themselves difficult to love.

But that's the thing. When we love the unlovable, we should expect tough days.

What does it mean to have a "tough day?" In this case, I don't simply mean a tough day like I had.

In this case, by "tough day" I mean that we should expect the kinds of days Jesus had.

By "tough day" I mean a day when we are rejected or opposed.

There are even times when having a "tough day" means being betrayed and suffering.

When we love people practically and sacrificially, particularly unlovable people, sometimes we will have tough days.

If it means expecting tough days, how can we love the unlovable?

We are wired to want good days. We work hard to avoid tough days. We don't like them.

If loving unlovable people involves tough days, then how can we love the unlovable?

Let's turn to Jesus to find out how.

JESUS HAD A TOUGH DAY WHEN HE LOVED THE UNLOVABLE

We see this in John 13:12-20:

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

Jesus humbled himself by doing humiliating work.

Washing feet in that day was servant's work. Jesus knew that.

Jesus also knew that he was the Teacher, the Rabbi to his students, his disciples.

They called him "Lord" or "Sir." He was their "master."

Jesus, God the Son, the Messiah or Christ, their Master and Lord, the Rabbi stooped down to wash feet like a common servant. That's not easy to do. Jesus was embracing a tough day.

Judas' betrayal was profound.

Judas betrayed his master and lord; that is treacherous in any culture.

Worse, Judas betrayed his friend. That's awful.

Worse still, Judas betrayed the host who stooped to wash his feet. That broke the foundation of first century Jewish society.

Jesus already felt the weight of Judas' betrayal. He was having a tough day.

Judas' betrayal was just part of Jesus' being rejected, opposed, and persecuted.

The Jewish religious leaders had been coming for Jesus for a long time.

They had rejected Jesus as a heretic, crazy man, and threat. They opposed him openly.

Their rejection and opposition had turned to openly plotting his downfall and death.

Jesus knew all of this. It weighed on him. He was having a tough day.

Washing feet foreshadowed Jesus' death on the cross.

Jesus called foot washing an example of how we are to love one another. It defines what godly love looks like; it's practical and sacrificial.

It points forward to the ultimate act of godly, practical, sacrificial love—the cross.

Jesus was only hours away from being arrested, tried, and crucified.

Loving his disciples, loving Judas, loving the unlovable, and loving us, Jesus died for us.

Loving the unlovable, Jesus's tough day was about to get even tougher.

JESUS TOLD US TO EXPECT TOUGH DAYS WHEN WE LOVE THE UNLOVABLE

Back in John 13:14-15, Jesus made explicit what we've known. Washing feet is an example:

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

Jesus affirmed back in verse 13 that he is indeed what they all suspected: Teacher or Rabbi and Lord. He even implies that he is Master and God Himself.

Then he makes the comparison and lesson explicit. If the Teacher/Rabbi/Master/Lord washes the servant/student/disciple's feet, then they should do what he has done.

By extension, we should do what he has done.

In John 13:16, though, Jesus reminded us that even though we are obeying God, when we love the unlovable, we should expect similar results to the ones Jesus himself got:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."

First, that means that if Jesus loves practically and sacrificially, then we his servants should follow his example and do the same. The servant is not above the master.

If Jesus serves, then we should expect to serve.

If Jesus loves practically and sacrificially, then we should love practically and sacrificially.

If Jesus loves the unlovable, then we should love the unlovable.

More broadly, though, Jesus is warning us to expect to get the same results he has gotten.

If people rejected, opposed, betrayed, and persecuted him, then they will do the same to us.

Jesus makes this implication explicit in **John 15:20**:

"... If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. ..."

If Jesus had tough days, then we will have tough days.

It's like the Shirelles sang in their classic song, "Mama Said."

The verses talk about a woman who is lonely and loves without being loved.

The chorus says, "Mama said there'd be days like this. 'There'll be days like this,' Mama said."

I'm not sure I'd like to have that woman as my mother. Let me see if I understand the song. I'm lonely, I get my heart broken, and there is no one who loves me as I want. I go to my mother for consolation, and my mother's response is, "Yep. That happens sometimes!"

Give me a bowl of ice cream or a hug, please!

But is Jesus doing the same thing in John 13? When we love practically and sacrificially and when we love the unlovable, we can expect tough days.

"Jesus said there'd be days like this. 'There'll be days like this,' my Savior said."

No. John 13:20 tells us that the decision people are making is about God, not just about us:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

Jesus sent his disciples and sends us. We are his representatives. When we love people practically and sacrificially and when we share Good News, we are sharing Jesus with them. Now when they respond to us, they aren't just responding to us but to the one who sends us.

Jesus makes this clear in **Luke 10:16**:

"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

So while we feel the tough days of rejection, opposition, betrayal, and suffering very personally at times, they aren't really directed toward us at all. They are directed at Jesus who sent us and at Jesus' Father who sent him.

Jesus told us to expect tough days when we love the unlovable practically and sacrificially, but those tough days aren't about us at all.

TOUGH DAYS ARE NOT THE END

Jesus wants us to know that tough days don't derail God's plan.

When we run into opposition, problems, suffering, and the unlovable in our own lives, we get the sense that our lives are off track, that something has gone wrong somewhere.

Jesus knew that his disciples were about to see Judas betray him, that their Master was about to be arrested, tried, sentenced, crucified, and buried. He knew that they would conclude quickly that Jesus' Kingdom-of-God enterprise was off track and had gone wrong.

It's no surprise that Jesus warns us ahead of time, "I know what's happening, I know what's about to happen; this is all according to plan, and that plan has been announced for years."

In **John 13:18-19**, Jesus suggests that this plan will give his followers more reasons to believe:

"... But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he."

Like Jesus, we know that when we have tough days, God's plan is still on track. It's not derailed by tough days, even though we may feel like our lives are turning into wrecks.

The passage Jesus quoted in John 13:18 tells us just how tough days can get.

The passage speaks about one who ate his bread (that is, experienced his hospitality) raising up his heel against Jesus. Jesus was quoting from Psalm 41.

When Jesus quotes a fragment of Psalm 41, it would have triggered the entire Psalm in the minds of his disciples, who likely had Psalm 41 memorized.

Psalm 41 describes enemies closing in and plotting the death of the Psalmist.

Psalm 41 describes exactly what Jesus was experiencing. It was describing the toughest days.

Psalm 41 implies, though, that tough days are not the end.

After the plot against the Psalmist had done its worst, **Psalm 41:10-12** continues:

*But you, O LORD, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them!
By this I know that you delight in me:
my enemy will not shout in triumph over me.
But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.*

Betrayal, rejection, persecution, and suffering are overturned! Tough days are overturned!

God raises up his faithful servants, and they get honor and life before God forever!

Jesus' own crucifixion was overturned in the resurrection.

Jesus' tough days were the worst. He was betrayed by his friend, arrested by his enemies, tried by his subjects, crucified by the conquerors, died, and was buried.

However (and this is an important "however"), God raised Jesus up from the dead.

Jesus came out of the grave alive again, glorified, to stand by the Father forever.

The crucifixion of Jesus is overturned in the resurrection. Tough days are not the end for Jesus!

Like Jesus, our tough days are overturned.

This is more than a promise that if we suffer, glory awaits.

Our own resurrection and glorification, the consummation of creation, and our eternal hope don't just give us a reward for suffering through tough days to love even the unlovable.

Resurrection, glorification, consummation, and eternity overturn tough days and the rejections, opposition, betrayals, and persecutions that lead to tough days. Eternity is a divine “no” to evil! Our tough days are part of a much bigger struggle that God wins!

WHEN WE EXPECT TOUGH DAYS, WE CAN LOVE THE UNLOVABLE

Let’s expect tough days.

When we love people—particularly the unlovable—practically and sacrificially, there will be tough days. We will be rejected, opposed, betrayed, and persecuted.

At a bare minimum, we will be deeply disappointed at times.

There will be glorious days! There will be tough days as well.

When we expect tough days, they are easier to take.

Let’s press on despite tough days.

Knowing that we will experience tough days when we love people, particularly the unlovable, we have a decision to make. Will we love anyway?

Jesus sets the example. Knowing that his love would require big sacrifices, he loved anyway.

Knowing that his love would lead to incredibly tough days, Jesus loved anyway.

Not only did he set the example for us, he commanded us to love anyway.

Jesus tells us to press on in loving even the unlovable despite tough days.

Right now, Christians in Ukraine are expecting and getting tough days and pressing on anyway.

The Russian invasion of the Ukraine has been going on for over a month.

We’ve been praying for Ukraine. I’ve felt particularly led to pray for the Christians in Ukraine. Of course, I pray for their safety and survival.

At the same time, this is a wonderful opportunity for God to do something big through them!

Ukrainian Christians are seizing these days. They are loving people practically and sacrificially despite the fact that they are having tough days and despite the fact that loving people practically and sacrificially may make their days even tougher.

Bombs are falling on Ukrainian cities. Buildings are being destroyed and people are suffering and dying, so people are looking to move west. That’s a tough day. There are Christians in those places.

Then there are churches in the western parts of the country, including in Rivne. Christians in those churches are taking aid east. They are delivering the aid, rescuing people, and helping them to make it to the west while bombs are falling, checkpoints are set up on the roads, and snipers are shooting at vehicles. Drivers are dying in this effort. These are tough days.

Back in Rivne, they are housing and providing for refugees. They give them water, food, hygiene items, and a chance to shower. They are housing 75-200 people a night.

Recently, bombs began falling on Rivne. These are tough days. They are pressing on anyway.

Let’s press on despite tough days.

Let’s love the unlovable anyway.

Our brothers and sisters in Ukraine are doing what Jesus did. They are expecting tough days, facing tough days, pressing on, loving others (even the unlovable) practically and sacrificially.

The church we saw today is part of a network of churches that is partnered directly with our network, Converge. We have sent money through Converge to help them.

Can we do more than support our Ukrainian brothers and sisters from a distance?

Can we learn from them?

Like them, can we press on, love others, and love the unlovable despite tough days?

Like Jesus can we love the unlovable despite tough days?