

# **“Christ-Like Love”**

John 13:1-17, 34-35, Maundy Thursday, April 2, 2015

**I imagine** that the two words **“Special Olympics”** would probably ring a bell for most of us **this evening**. “Special Olympics,” according to their own website is now the **world’s largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities**. Special Olympics provides year-round training and competitions to more than **4.4 million athletes in 170 countries**. **Seventy Thousand Special Olympics events are held each year all around the world!**

Well having said this, there was a **Special Olympics event that took place in Seattle, Washington several years ago**. The event was the **100 yard dash; involving 9 contestants**. All were eager and ready to go—**just waiting for the gun to be fired**. When the gun was fired, they started their run; running as they best knew how to run. **These nine young people made up of both boys and girls were filled with excitement as they ran and laughed and raced to the finish line**. But wouldn’t you know it?! **Just when everyone seemed to be having a grand old time, one little boy stumbled and fell face down on the asphalt** and was now just lying there on the track and really crying!

This is exactly when the most unusual thing happened; **not something you would ever expect to see happen in any other type of athletic competition!** Immediately, the other eight contestants **slowed down!** **They looked back and then all of them turned around with one accord** and went back to where that boy was lying and crying! Surprisingly enough, every one of them chose to help him!

**One young lady with Down’s syndrome even bent down and kissed him and said, “Here this will make it better!”** Then all nine of those contestants in that Special Olympics competition there in Seattle, Washington that day, **linked arms and walked together with smiles on their faces toward the finish line**. Everyone in the stadium stood up and the applause went on for what seemed like forever!

**What had the audience seen there that day? You’d better believe it: They saw love in action and it had such a powerful effect on them that they just stood there and applauded.**

In our Gospel lesson this evening the Apostle John is now beginning to share with us some of the most memorable moments of so much that took place there that first Maundy Thursday between Jesus and his disciples in that Upper Room!

**(1). There was first of all that most unusual act of Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet.**

Of course it was customary in that specific time and culture that if you invited guests over to your home for a dinner party, that usually a servant would have been arranged to be paid to not only be there, but specifically to wash everyone feet as they would come through the front door.

Let’s remember that **people did not wear socks and shoes the way that so many of us do so today; shoes that are laced up tightly with shoe strings**. They wore opened-toe sandals, and they walked for miles on dusty roads, and their feet would become **“dirty.”**

**But this custom wasn’t established just to remove the physical dirt from your guest’s feet** as they entered your home but it also provided the **traveler with a little personal comfort and refreshment**. Is it possible that the water could have been heated? It’s possible, I guess.

So why would this become such a welcoming gesture, you may be asking yourself!?!

Have you noticed recent years that pedicures and manicures are more popular among the American people today than they have been in decades? And the clientele are no longer just limited to women. Men, we are told, are getting in on the act of receiving frequent manicures and pedicures too! People find it refreshing to go there to those **“foot-soaking” and “foot-washing” establishments** where they can allow their feet to become tenderized and refreshed in that basin of circulating and pulsating warm water. Then the customer’s feet are dried. Their nails are trimmed. The rough spots and calluses on their heels may be worn smooth through the proper use of an emery board.

**(2). Secondly, it was there in that Upper Room that Jesus had arranged to share the Passover Meal with his disciples for the last time!**

And Jesus, knowing full-well, that his suffering and passion, by this time, were only a few short hours away, wanted to give his disciples one final lesson, reminding them once again how **the expression of true love, the kind of love that our Heavenly Father has for us, always requires a true spirit of humility on the part of those who are genuinely committed to sharing that love**, “Christ’s love” with others in a fallen world.

I like what St. Paul has to say to us in **Romans 12: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, in proportion to our faith. If service, in our serving! The one who teaches, in his teaching. The one who exhorts in his exhortation! The one who contributes in generosity! The one who leads, with zeal! The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness!” (Romans 12:3-8)**

When Jesus says, **“Love one another just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another!” (Vv. 34-35)** Jesus was, in part, reminding them that up to this time people could easily see that they were his disciples, because of the close company that they were always keeping with him, who in their physical bodies were never very far away from his physical body. But now Jesus would soon be fulfilling his mission of reconciling every one of us to his Heavenly Father, through his perfect life, death and resurrection. And when he ascended once again, 40 days following his resurrection, he would no longer be visibly present for the unbelieving world. Jesus said that people, nevertheless, would be able to recognize them as his disciples in the world—when their lifestyles would become more and more highly reflective of his own! **So what is Christ-like love like? There are many answers we could give to this question, but I want to share only four of those answers with you tonight!**

**First of all, Christ-like love is very selfless!**

This does not mean that we take on a spirit of false humility, discounting our own self-worth! To be selfless in our love towards others, does not mean that we forget to be stewards of our own bodies, minds, and souls! It is not some weird form of self-deprecation. It doesn’t mean that we can’t ever receive a compliment from others for work well done!

**But self-less love means that we genuinely sense that we also have a calling from God to provide a meaningful service to him, through meaningful service to other people for their benefit! We are people who are committed to making this world a better place! People who practice a self-less kind of love want to make a**

positive difference for others in this world! Paul tells the Colossians, **“And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him!”**

Assuming a proper posture of self-less love means knowing where we have come from and where we are going: that we too have come from God into this world and that at the end of our days upon this earth we are going back to God. He is the beginning of all our yesterdays and the end of all our tomorrows!

Listen to verses 1 and 3 of our Gospel lesson again this evening: **“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! And 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 the 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!”**

**Secondly, Christ-like love is very steadfast! “Having loved his own who were in this world, he loved them to the end!”**

Obviously there must have been some times when Jesus experienced a little frustration with his disciples, when they seemed to be so slow to catch on to the divine truths he was so earnestly seeking to share with them! Even there in the Upper Room that night, you remember it was Philip who said to Jesus, “Show us the Father and it is enough for us!” Jesus said to Philip, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say ‘Show us the Father!’ (John 14:8-9)?

This is the night before Jesus is crucified. The twelve disciples are eating **“Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me!” (John 13:21).**

Then John shares some information with us that it seems, only he was privy to there that night!

John was reclining next to Jesus and asked him, **“Lord, who is it?” (v. 25)**

Jesus answered, probably in a very low voice so that only John could hear what Jesus was saying since the text also tells us that when Judas left the others they had no idea what was going on (v. 29). But Jesus had told John, **“It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it in the sop!” (v. 26)**

Then Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas and said, **“What you are going to do, do quickly!” (v. 27).** And in verse 30 Judas leaves. And the very next thing Jesus says is, **“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him!”** At that very moment when the final betrayal has been set in motion—at that moment Jesus says, **“Now!” “Now is the Son of Man glorified!”** What Jesus meant is that now the final step of his soon being handed over to be crucified for our sins is now set in motion. Now the Son of Man, Jesus, will shine with the greatest glory. And God will shine gloriously through him!”

I am sure that John must have powerfully felt the amazement of that unforgettable moment! Of all the disciples, only John could at this moment feel the full amazement at this and he must have been utterly stunned. Judas—the one entrusted with the money these three years (v. 29); suddenly now in a flash Judas’ past behavior begins to make to John much more sense. So this is why

he gave Mary of Bethany such a hard time for anointing Jesus' body with that vial of alabaster perfume (John 12:3-6).

And while John watches Judas leave and John's mind is no doubt churning with the shocking news that Judas was going to betray their Master, he hears Jesus say, ***"Now is the Son of Man glorified!"*** And now another boulder is thrown down into the churning waters of John's mind. Glory, now!?! Betrayal now but resulting in glory? How could this be?

### **Thirdly, Christ-like love is very serving!**

Some people in this room are old enough to remember a great American comedian by the name of George Burns; one of the few entertainers whose career successfully spanned vaudeville, film, radio and television. Having been born in 1896 and not dying until 1996 he lived to the ripe old age of 100 years old. Some of you will even remember him for his role in that Hollywood Box Office Hit "Oh God!" But George Burns also authored a few books before he died. One of his best-sellers was a book entitled: **BUY TWO BOOKS AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING**. And in this book, Burns writes: **"If you were to go around asking the American people what would make them happier, you'd get answers like a new car, a bigger house, a pay raise, winning a lottery, a face-lift, more kids, less kids, a new restaurant to go to, and probably not even one in a hundred would say a chance to help people. And yet that may bring to people the most happiness of all!"**

Then George Burns continued, "I don't know Dr. Jonas Salk, but after what he has done for millions of people in our nation with his discovery of a polio vaccine, if he isn't happy, he should have that brilliant head of his examined! Of course, not all of us can do what he did! I know I can't do what he did! He beat me to it! But the point is, it doesn't have to be anything all that extraordinary. It can be working for a worthy cause, performing a needed service, or just doing something that helps another person!"

### **Fourthly, Christ-like love is very sanctifying!**

One very important aspect of this Gospel lesson this evening is Peter's initial refusal to allow Jesus to wash his feet. We don't know how many of Jesus' disciples have already had their feet washed by Jesus at this point, but Peter was certainly aware that Jesus was much more than a mere ordinary man. It was Peter who first confessed Jesus to "be the Christ the Son of the living God" on the road to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:16).

According to Luke chapter 5, when the disciples had fished all night but not caught any fish, Jesus uses Peter's boat the next morning for his pulpit, and puts out from the shore, so the multitudes of people who are gathered there along that shore can adequately see him! Remember how Jesus, the carpenter, tells Peter, that old-seasoned fisherman to put his boat out into the water again, but this time to let down his nets from the other side of the boat. Peter was convinced that this would be an exercise in futility for sure, but Peter turned out to be dead wrong! This is when he plunges into the water, before Jesus, and says to our Savior, "Lord, depart from me for I am a sinful man!" Peter had been made very aware of his own sin!

Even though Peter was forgiven, as long as Peter lived out his life in this fallen world, he would require a continual stream of forgiveness flowing to him from the cross of Christ! And don't we all? And don't we all need to be recommitted this evening to sharing Jesus's forgiving love with everyone we can, not because they deserve it, but precisely because they need it, and the only way it can properly flow to them is through the likes of you and me.

Paul's letter to the church of Galatia is one of his harshest letters written in the New Testament in terms of the "tone" of the letter. Paul was upset with those false teachers who were saying that faith in Christ was not enough to save a sinner, circumcision was also a necessary requirement. A false teaching that Paul wholeheartedly refutes here.

But then Paul closes this rather harsh letter with some of the most comforting and tender words he had ever written to anyone at any time! Let me share with you again a few select verses from chapter 6.

***“Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ!” (Galatians 6:1-2)***

And isn’t the law of Christ above all that we forgive others as he also forgives us? **Max Lucado** puts it this way: “Can the sick mock the ill? Can the blind judge the deaf? In the same way can the sinner condemn the sinner? Absolutely not!

Lucado goes on to say, “Be careful! The Peter who denies Jesus at tonight’s fire may proclaim him with fire at tomorrow’s Pentecost celebration! The Samson who is blind and weak today may use his final strength to level the pillars of godlessness. A stuttering shepherd in this generation may be the mighty Moses of the next! Don’t call Noah a fool, you may be asking him for a lift!”

Christ-like love it is a self-less form of love. It is a steadfast kind of love. It is a serving kind of love. And it is a sanctifying kind of love!

And aren’t we glad that this love is available to us again this evening from our God as a gift of his grace when we read his Scriptures, when we hear his Gospel proclaimed, when we confess our sins, and come forward again this night to receive his true Body and true Blood for the forgiveness of all of sins.

***“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes!” (I Corinthians 11:26) Amen***