

Sermon "Even Judas " John 13:1-38 March 13, 2022 Lent 3

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"Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." This saying is attributed to Francis of Assisi, the great mystic of 13th Century Italy. Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words

"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear. "

These are the words of the American poet, Edward Guest: "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day"

To see a sermon is a good thing. If it was true in St Francis day it certainly is now. We live in an age of YouTube and TikTok. Visual mediums are the dominant means of communication. A picture paints a thousand words. Actions speak louder than words...

Maybe though, words and actions compliment one another. Sometimes visuals need words. Actions need context and explanation.

This week at an English Premier League game between Everton and Newcastle, a young man ran onto the field and tied himself to a goal post. The game stopped. The cameras were focused on the young man. He had the attention of an international audience. It took time for stewards to cut him free from the post. And one of the broadcast commentators said of the young man tied to the post: "he appears to be protesting something..."

He appears to be protesting something... but what.... His action was bold, it got attention, but there was no sign, no banner, no t-shirt with a clear message, he wasn't wearing an identifiable symbol or logo. What was this all about? He appears to be protesting *something*...

Actions sometimes need words. What we do sometimes is aided by an explanation, a statement.

When Volodymyr Zelensky the Ukrainian President spoke to the Canadian Parliament this week his presentation included a video. Beyond his words, he powerfully communicated the plight of the Ukrainian people by showing images of his country at peace and then under siege. This visual communication accompanied his words and together they had greater impact.

In the gospel today we hear familiar words. Jesus is in an upper room, on the night of his betrayal. These are the final hours that Jesus spends with his followers before the events of Easter. And he gives them a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus links words and example, what is heard with what is seen. Love one another ...as I have loved you. Hear the words- Love one another. See my example- as I have loved you...

Jesus says we are to love as he loves. And the followers of Jesus have seen how Jesus loves. The love of Jesus is not a warm feeling, a fuzzy sentiment. It's active. Jesus healed the sick. Gave

sight to the blind. Fed the hungry. Welcomed the outcast, Raged against injustice. Challenged authority. Defied convention.

Sometimes Jesus followers are criticized for being political, or for creating controversy or discomfort. But isn't this what the love of Jesus looked like? Being an Affirming ministry, an Anti Racist church, advocating for social or economic justice, isn't this faithfulness? Isn't this preaching the gospel beyond words? Isn't this a sermon you can see? Isn't this love made visible? Love one another as I have loved you.

Just before Jesus words about love he takes a particular action. Jesus washes his disciples' feet. He sits before each of them and washes their feet. It's a very personal, intimate action.

Charles Schulz once wrote, through the character Linus: "I love humanity, its people I can't stand." Jesus' love is not abstract. It's particular. Jesus demonstrates his love, one by one by one. Jesus took time to kneel before each of those who were there in the upper room. And if we love like Jesus, are we not called to love not just some abstract of humanity but the particular people we encounter day by day?

Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus demonstrates his love in washing his disciples' feet, all of his disciples' feet.

It was Passover meal that Jesus attended in the Upper room. The Passover is an intergenerational gathering, a family celebration. We may picture the scene as being like DaVinci's painting, with 12 men and Jesus sitting at a table, but a Passover meal might well have included women and children. Jesus' mother Mary, Mary Magdalene... who knows what others were there at the table. And would Jesus have stopped with the 12 men, or would he have included all others there?

What is really remarkable is that Jesus washed everyone's feet. Even the betrayer. Even Judas.

Judas is at the table with Jesus. Jesus pauses and washes the feet of all gathered there. Later in the scene Judas leaves and Jesus knows that Judas will betray him. Yet Jesus washed his feet. He kneels before one who will betray him to his death....and he washes Judas' feet.

Peter will deny Jesus three times, Jesus knows this. And still Jesus washed Peter's feet.

All the followers of Jesus will abandon him and run in fear, all but Jesus' mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene and John, all who in the narrative of John's gospel stay at the cross with Jesus.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, kneels before them one by one, and kneels before them to show love even though they betray and deny and abandon him.

Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus demonstrates, lives out, lets us see a love that is mind-blowingly radicle, incredibly challenging. Jesus loves without boundaries. We see it and it is remarkable.

We began with St Francis. Another Francis.... the Bishop of Rome. Every year in Holy Week this Francis makes today's gospel story visible by washing the feet of those on the margins of society. In a year when Italy had many refugees come to its shores Francis washed the feet of refugees fleeing violence, Christian, Muslim, atheists – no distinction. Last year he went to prison to wash the feet of 12 convicted felons.

In our words and our actions, and maybe best with both together, may we live the love of Jesus. Love one another as I have loved you. Amen