

Today's scripture is again punctuated by paradoxes and misunderstanding. Jesus takes an every-day task (washing the feet of guests) and turns the world upside down by using it as a prophetic action which points to the heart of his teaching, word and life ethos. This story begins the second half of John's gospel called the Book of Signs" which focuses around the theme of the hour of Jesus having come and what that means. The signs of the first half (the Book of Signs in John 1:39-12:50) point to this paradoxical truth. This narrative approach comes from the work of Raymond E. Brown.

his hour: the first time the word "**hour**" was used is in the story of the sign of new wine at the wedding in Cana. <<On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? **My hour** has not yet come.>> John 2:1-4 It's here in today's text that we told **this hour, his hour**, has finally come. We see in the increased use of this metaphor in this second half of John's gospel that it refers to the passion of Jesus: his crucifixion, death, and eventual resurrection. Just before today's passage is when the hour first arrives: "²³ Jesus answered them, "**The hour has come** for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also." John 12:23-26

to the end: this expression means both "utterly or completely" as well as "up to and into death [the end of life]." This points ahead to the final words of Jesus in John 19:30 "It is finished."

took off: literally "laid [down]" the same expression just used in John 10:11 "'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." to talk about his passion (also in John 10:15; 17 & 18).

wash the disciples' feet: This was a common task for slaves or servants as one's feet would be quite dirty from traveling dirt roads in sandals. The rabbis taught that washing feet was not a worthy task for a Hebrew slave to do, indicating the debasement of such an action [see Midrash Mekita on Exodus 21:2]. Jesus goes to the extreme in his action.

no share with me: this can be translated as "heritage," pointing to the eschatological heritage of faith [the afterlife]. The same expression is used in Luke 23:43 "Jesus replied [to the criminal on the cross beside him], "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.""

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 2.25.2018

John 13:1-35

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that **his hour** had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me **TEACHER AND LORD**—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your **LORD AND TEACHER**, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, **servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than**

TEACHER AND LORD—LORD AND TEACHER: Notice the flip in order. This was a common phrase used to refer to rabbis. In John's gospel Jesus initially is most often called Rabbi (or teacher) and as the gospel progresses increasingly called Lord (Kurios).

blessed: the word in Greek is "*makaros*" the same as used in the beatitudes. It means "happy, blessed, or fortunate."

he immediately went out. And it was night: Looking throughout John night is the time of confusion, betrayal and evil. Think back on the prologue about light and darkness. Think back to Nicodemus who comes to visit Jesus at night in John 3. And now here at the moment Judas makes his choice night falls.

Judas goes "out" – not just from the house but also from the community of the disciples. It points back to this social exclusion as the deepest sin:

From the story of the blind man in John 9:22-23

²² The formerly blind man's parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that *anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue*. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

And the teaching on the good shepherd in John 10

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² *The hired hand*, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and *leaves the sheep and runs away*—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ *The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep*. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

In John 18 we see that Jesus seems to "betray" himself (identifying himself) to those come to arrest him.

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" ⁵ They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are *blessed* if you do them. ¹⁸ I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹ I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. ²⁰ Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

²¹ After saying this Jesus was **troubled in spirit**, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³ One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. **And it was night.**

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in this story?
- With whom do you identify in the story? Why?
- What is Jesus trying to teach and show? What do those around the table understand?
- Love is the first verb used in this text – it sets the stage for everything that follows. What does love mean for you? For us as followers of Jesus? How do we love others?; ourselves?; God?
- Two extreme representations of how to understand this love are articulated by two 20th century philosophers: Friedrich Nietzsche and Simone Weil.
 - Nietzsche thought of Christian love as weakness, which created weakness civilization-wide in condoning and glorifying human weakness. His ideas later foundationally inspired the rise of fascism and nazism.
 - Simone Weil was a French Jew who came to follow Jesus and who embraced near total-depravation (she starved to death giving most of her food away to others during the time of WW 2) as the highest expression of Christian love.
 - How do you respond to their two seminal reflections? How are they present (or absent) in our society?; political context?; church practice?; social world? How do they interact with the proclamation of the same message by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

“What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power in itself in man.

What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness.

What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome.

Not contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue, but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtù*, virtue free of moralic acid).

The weak and ill-constituted shall perish: first principle of *our* philanthropy. No one shall help them to do so.

What is more harmful than any vice? – Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak – Christianity....”

- Friedrich Nietzsche “N° 2” in *The Anti-Christ*. 1895.



“Affliction in itself is not enough for the attainment of total detachment. Unconsoled affliction is necessary. There must be no consolation – no apparent consolation. Ineffable consolation then comes down.

To forgive debts. To accept the past without asking for future compensation. To stop time at the present instant. This is also the acceptance of death.

‘He emptied himself of his divinity.’ To empty ourselves of the world. To take the form of a slave. To reduce ourselves to the point we occupy in space and time – that is to say, to nothing.

To strip ourselves of the imaginary royalty of the world. Absolute solitude. Then we possess the truth of the world.”

– Simone Weil,
on “Detachment” in *Gravity and Grace*. 1947.



“Contradiction experienced to the very depths of the being tears us heart and soul: it is the cross.”

– Simone Weil,
on Contradiction in *Gravity and Grace*. 1947.

“God crosses through the thickness of the world to come to us.”

– Simone Weil,
on The Cross in *Gravity and Grace*.