

No Greater Love – In Service ²

✦ **Awesome example** (vv.1-20)

✦ **Glorious command** (vv.21-38)

In the Name of Jesus, God's love in human flesh and blood, dear repentant disciples of our Lord:

We've all suffered some form of separation anxiety. One website explained: "Tearful, tantrum-filled goodbyes are common during a child's earliest years. Around the first birthday, many kids develop separation anxiety, getting upset when a parent tries to leave them with someone else. Though separation anxiety is a perfectly normal part of childhood development, it can be unsettling. Understanding what your child is going through and having a few coping strategies can help both of you get through it."³

At the Passover meal in the upper room our Savior felt the most painful anxiety coming on himself and his disciples. He calls them "*dear children.*" (v.33) What Jesus faced was infinitely more agonizing than a parent's worst nightmare; Jesus was going to the cross. Seeing him arrested, tortured and crucified after they had fled in terror, would shake the disciples to the depths of their souls. Jesus was more than a parent or a brother. They looked to him as the promised Messiah. Jesus needed to prepare their hearts by preaching his *Passion Sermons* in John 13-17. Jesus proclaims by word and deed that beyond him there is **No Greater Love**. Tonight we see our Savior's unmatched **Love – In Service**. Marvel first at Jesus'...

✦ **Awesome example** (vv.1-20)

Throughout his Gospel account, John, the disciple Jesus loved, emphasizes that Jesus was always fully aware of his mission as he resolutely pressed on to the cross. "*Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*"

Look who was there and wonder all the more at Jesus' **Awesome example**. Peter would swear undying loyalty, then deny ever knowing Jesus. James and John were called "Sons of Thunder" because they once asked Jesus to destroy an entire Samaritan village for not welcoming them. Matthew was a despised tax collector. Another Simon was a zealot. No one had a reputation for respect except Nathaniel, and he too would soon run away. But for Judas to experience Jesus **Love – In service**? "*The devil had already hurled into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, to betray him.*"

Now imagine as Jesus performs the humble task of a slave. You watch in wide-eyed wonder as he sets aside his robe to wrap a towel around his waste. With a basin of water he finally comes around to you. You feel his gentle hands on your feet, washing, then drying them with his towel. Peter alone objects, "*No, you will never wash my feet – ever!*" But Jesus replies, "*If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.*" Maybe you're nodding when Peter replies: "*Lord, not just my feet, but also my hands and my head!*" Yet Jesus says only the feet need washing because you have all had a bath. All are clean except one. How confusing. And then Jesus' wraps up his lesson as he reclines again at the table: "*Now if I, the Lord and the 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 for you. Amen, Amen, I tell 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, you are blessed if you do them.*"

¹ Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

² First in Lenten series: *No Greater Love – Our Savior's Passion Sermons*. March-April, 2014 – New Life, Shoreview, MN

³ http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/sep_anxiety.html

Are we really willing to follow such a leader? Are we able? We all have false expectations of being a Christian. Like those early disciples, we instinctively expect our sacrifices to earn some consideration. We too would get angry with James and John for requesting positions in glory with Jesus – not because they were out line, but because we want that glory and honor for ourselves. You might think, “I’m too shy for that.” But then comes a time that a brother or sister does not appreciate some idea or opinion of yours, and your pride wells up in resentment. You may be selfishly willing to let others wash your feet by letting them work at church. But if you are an active volunteer, can you resist resenting other members who don’t seem to notice or care? Our sinful self hides in the weeds until the worst of times – like Peter swearing his love for Jesus, vastly superior, so victorious, just won’t quit – until the rooster crows a few hours later. Jesus’ **Awesome example** is so much greater than foot washing. There is **No Greater Love – In service**. Follow him to the cross. See the proof of his...

✠ **Glorious command (vv.21-38)**

Knowing what you know about the rest of the story, what would you do if you were Jesus and you came to Judas Iscariot? Knowing full well the depth of Judas’ treachery, Jesus washed his feet too. *Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: One of you will betray me!” The disciples stared at each other, perplexed who he was talking about.* Peter in particular wants to know what this is all about, so he has John ask from his place right next to Jesus. Jesus gives them the signal of dipping a piece of bread and giving it to Judas. But there is no anger, no hatred, no hurt in Jesus’ voice. He actually tells Judas, *“What you are doing, do quickly.”* The other disciples guess Judas their treasurer is supposed to buy some supplies or give a gift to the poor. Years later when the Holy Spirit inspired John to write this account, he could see the darkness in Judas’ soul: *“He went out. And it was night.”*

Treachery would lead to torture and terror as none of them had ever experienced before. Yet Jesus speaks of glory! *“Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.”* How can this be?

Search the Scriptures for God’s glory – in the desert, at the tabernacle, in Jerusalem at the temple, in God’s throne room where Isaiah was commissioned amid the cries of fiery seraphim calling to each other: *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”* (Isaiah 6:3) Follow God’s glory through the tragic story of Israel in Psalm 136 as the LORD God delivers them. Verse after verse the same glorious refrain: *“For his mercy endures forever.”* Our forefathers loved those words so much that they put them in a table prayer to say at meals daily. Search and you will find God’s glory is to love sinners, the worst of sinners condemned by the world: Sinners like Peter, Judas, the dying thief and me. God’s glory is to love us and rescue us from our sins by the perfect life and innocent death of his only begotten Son. Kneel in awesome wonder. Give thanks for Christ’s **Glorious command**.

“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. I have loved you so that you also may love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Christ-like **Love – In service** impressed many cruel Roman guards as they tortured Christians and threw them to the lions. The simple words of one guard have come down to us from antiquity. Seeing how the Christians attended to each other as their blood was spilt on the sands of the arena, he said, “Behold, how they loved!”

Christ’s **Glorious command** shows itself by **Love – In Service** for our community. It draws up lists of people who need Jesus. Love shining through his people expects nothing in return. It attracts strangers too. Visitors find new friends and family eager to show them God’s love by word and deed.

Peter will hear the rooster crow the next morning. He will see Jesus turn and look in love and sorrow. Peter will weep bitterly. Jesus still serves us with warnings. He still restores us in full and free forgiveness. Christ’s love saves us from separation anxiety from God and each other. Eternity will dawn at the wedding feast of the Lamb because there is **No Greater Love** than Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.