

The Bible in One Year Week 21: The Upper Room (John Pt. 6)

(John 13:1-17, 14:1-7, 17:20-26)

• It's Hard to Say Goodbye

- What is the hardest goodbye you've ever had to say? Maybe as a kid or an adult, you had to move to a new school, a new community, a new job. Maybe someone in your family had to spend extended time overseas for a job. The hardest goodbyes are the ones with the greatest distance and the greatest time-table: when someone has to go far away, with no timeline, and you know might never see them again. That's hard.
 - When I spent four-months overseas for a study abroad semester in college, our group of students came from colleges all over the country. We all bonded deeply in that short time and I still remember how emotional it was when we had to say goodbye: we were excited to go home, but we were sad to leave. I can still feel those last moments so vividly. They were really tearful, because we knew after all we'd been through, we would never be together in the same way or the same place again. Do you know what that feels like? Seasons of change and farewell are really bittersweet, emotional, and disorienting.
- We've been working through the Gospel of John for six weeks and we have just one week left before we begin the book of Acts. Today, we come to a part of the story where Jesus' disciples are beginning to feel the weight of an imminent goodbye they can't fully understand. Jesus has been gently hinting at this for a long time with them, but now he's openly preparing them—they're confused, scared, and sad. But this is not really a normal "goodbye." Jesus explains to them that he's going to be leaving them, but at the same time, *he's always going to be with them*.
 - Thus far, the action of the story has taken them all over the place: from the Jordan River to Galilee to Samaria to Jerusalem and more. But this section today is the largest pause in the whole book: for five chapters, we get to sit with Jesus and his disciples in the famous "Upper Room" in which he washes their feet and tells them all kinds of things he wants them to know before he returns to the Father.
- Think of how emotional this time was for his disciples: for several years, they've followed this man as their master, their teacher, their Lord. They left everything they knew to follow him, to serve his mission. They saw his power and his glory and came to believe he was the Messiah, the Son of God. He had greater influence on them than anyone else and showed them adventures that changed their lives. Now, without fully understanding, they were beginning to see that something was about to change: he was going away from them. This whole section in the Upper Room is about Jesus preparing them for that massive transition, and how they would carry on his mission, which they couldn't possibly be ready for without his help.
 - And it all hinges on this promise: he was going to leave them, *but not really*. He was leaving, *but they wouldn't be left alone*. He was returning to the Father, but he was sending them the Holy Spirit. *And this is actually a good thing*: he said it was for their *benefit* that he was going to leave so he could send the Spirit. It was all part of the plan.
 - But it didn't make sense! This was not what they signed up for! How could it possibly be to their benefit that Jesus was *leaving*? How could they continue his work? As we begin to unpack the *riches* of Jesus' words in the Upper Room, we can start to see how and why.

• "The Upper Room Discourse"

- Let's dig in. Since it's Pentecost Sunday, we'll focus a lot on what Jesus says about the Holy Spirit, but first, we'll take a little overview to understand the bigger picture.
 - Scholars call this section from John 13-17 "The Upper Room Discourse," because, apart from a few interruptions by the Disciples, it's this lengthy teaching of Jesus. As you read, it can be hard to follow because, rather than a straightforward, linear message, it takes a several major themes and kind of circles around them, building into the final chapter with Jesus' amazing prayer.
- It all begins with an unforgettable scene: Jesus washing the disciples' disgusting feet. Here, the greatest Master does the job reserved for the lowest slaves. And this moment brings a greater focus to everything that came before and everything that comes after.

- All of John's Gospel has been building to "the hour," Jesus' purpose for coming to earth. And it builds to the shocking message that Christ's moment of greatest suffering and shame is the greatest revelation of his glory. According to John, the highest glory of God, in all his love and splendor and power, is seen in Christ the Son of God *hanging on a cross*. That's why as Jesus is performing this humiliating act of washing his followers' feet, he says to them, "*You don't understand what I'm doing for you right now, but later you will.*"
- Jesus washes his disciples' feet to show us that to go high, we have to go low; to love well, we have to lay down ourselves. This is the deep revelation of the heart of God that is seen fully in the cross. And this is to be the heart of his followers everywhere. *Self-giving Love*. This kind of love didn't make sense to the disciples. It doesn't make sense to us. It's not of this world. It's what Jesus invites us into as he explains all these things to them in the Upper Room.
- Chapters 14-17 after the foot washing cover lots of ideas, but here are the three main themes:
 - First, the theme of *love*: God's self-giving love and the love of Jesus' followers. Jesus says a lot about what God's love looks like after he just showed it to them. Then he tells them in multiple ways that his command is to *show this love to each other and the world*. And he tells them that their obedience to him is a direct reflection of their love. "*The one who loves me will keep my commands,*" (John 14:15) and his command is this: "*Love one another as I have loved you,*" (John 15:12). Loving Jesus means *following* Jesus; following means *obeying* Jesus; obeying Jesus means *loving* like Jesus; loving like Jesus means *washing feet and laying down our lives* like Jesus. It's radically counter-cultural, it's not of this world. And that leads to the next theme:
 - Jesus prepares his disciples for the reality that following him in this world *will not be a cakewalk*. We know from history that these early followers of Jesus were about to go through a very intense wave of persecution. Following Christ means we are not of this world anymore. And because of that, Jesus says, the world won't like us. We're different. We no longer operate out of the currency of the kingdoms of this world, we belong to a Kingdom that is not of this world. So, on the one hand, following Christ means you'll receive a peace in your life that's like nothing you've ever known; and on the other hand, it means you're voluntarily signing up for a life that will put you in tension with the world. Even if you don't face outright persecution like these first disciples faced, you will feel that tension every day. You'll feel that pull to *blend in*, to compromise, to not live different. And as you hold your ground with Christ, you'll feel that subtle (or not so subtle) rejection that *you don't belong*. Because you follow Jesus, you're different. And Jesus in his final moments with his disciples wanted to prepare us for that.
 - And that leads to the third major theme: *we can't do this alone; we need help*. We can't live like this merely by living *from ourselves*. We can't embody the holy, self-giving, foot-washing, cruciform love of God to each other let alone the world that rejects us without his help. *We need help from outside of ourselves if we're going to live for more than ourselves*. And Jesus tells the disciples that *help is on the way* and his name is "the Holy Spirit." He's leaving so that he can send us the Holy Spirit. And it's to our advantage because, while he was with us in body he could only be in one place at one time, but by ascending back to the Father and sending the Spirit, he can be in all places, at all times, with all people who call on his name.
- **What John's Gospel Teaches about the Holy Spirit**
 - So, those are three major themes of the Upper Room: God's love and our calling to live in it, the tension we'll face in the world as Jesus' followers, and the help that comes through the Holy Spirit. Since it's Pentecost, let's look just a little more at what Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit and try to tie it together. Here are some things John's Gospel reveals about the Holy Spirit:
 - John 14:15-18, "*If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*" And he goes on to say, "*Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*" So, in a nutshell, Jesus is going away...but he's coming to us...because...the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit means the Father and Son are

making their home with us; the Spirit means the personal presence of God is always *with us* and *in us*. And the Spirit comes to us when we truly say yes to following Jesus. Wow.

- Next, John 14:25-27, *“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* The Holy Spirit comes to finish the job that Jesus started; the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and works out the process of God’s salvation in our lives. And the Holy Spirit means *peace* that is greater than anything this world can give, peace from heaven. Wow again!
- The Holy Spirit is our Advocate, our Comforter, the Spirit of truth, the one who helps us witness to Christ, the one who connects us with the presence of the Father and the Son in the most intimate way. Jesus says all of this and more to the confused and distressed disciples, but eventually, they would realize everything he was saying *was true*—they were going to experience it for themselves. He’s the great gift of God for all who follow Jesus!
- And the truth is, *we can’t follow Jesus without the gift of the Holy Spirit—without the Helper.*
 - Jesus came and revealed to us the glory of God in the deepest way: everything he did was a reflection of that intimate moment in the Upper Room of washing his disciples’ feet, and a reflection of what he was going to do on the cross. He is Love. A Love that is greater than anything we could know. And his purpose is that *we would get wrapped up in that love and become that love for the world.*
 - You can’t give that kind of love unless you’ve received that kind of love. And it’s the Holy Spirit who *wraps us up in the Love of God that is in the Trinity.* By inviting us to believe and follow Jesus, God is inviting us to enter into that eternal Love that is from the beginning, the mutual, indwelling love of the Father and Son and Spirit—and as we enter into that Love, we can then love ourselves and others the same way. Washing feet. Giving ourselves. It changes the world.
 - The *only reason* we’re here still talking about Jesus is because the Holy Spirit came to that group of bewildered disciples on that day we call Pentecost to fill them with the Holy love of God and empower them to be Jesus’ witnesses. And the only way we’re going to continue that mission of being his love in this world is if *we* are filled and empowered by that same Spirit.
 - Pastor Shane Bishop said, *“Love is the supernatural disposition God gives his children toward the world. We will not reach people for Jesus Christ if deep down, we think we are better than they are.”*
 - And so, Jesus prays at the end of this section, *“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*
 - The Father sent the Son and the Son sent the Spirit so that this rift in the relationship between heaven and earth could be restored and we could all get wrapped up in the great, eternal Love Fest that is the Triune God. *Wow, wow, and wow some more!*
- And now, the question for us is the same question that comes up at every part of John’s Gospel: *Do you believe this? Will you receive this? Do you want this?*
 - Do you experience the Love of God in your life, deeply, truly, intimately, the way Jesus prayed for his followers to experience it in the Upper Room? If you want to, this is how: repent, believe, and ask. *Repent* of your sin, *believe* in the Name of Jesus, and *ask* the Holy Spirit to come into your life so you can know that Holy Love Fest for yourself. *If you want to be loved like that and become love like that*, you just have to ask and follow. There’s no way we can love like that without God’s help. But with God’s help, anything is possible. Why not now?