

“Unexpected Jesus”

John 13:1-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • March 31, 2013 • Maundy Thursday

Do any of you remember WWJD? It stands for “what would Jesus do.” Back in the 90s this slogan became popular, especially among Christian teens. They would wear bracelets with these letters, WWJD, on them. The bracelet was to serve as a reminder in every situation they found themselves in to ask what Jesus would do in that situation. Seems like a great idea, right? And in general it is a good idea to try to be more like Christ in your daily life.

But there’s a problem. As we read about Jesus in the pages of the New Testament we discover that *nobody* was able to figure out what Jesus was going to do. He spent time with tax collectors, eating at their homes and inviting one of them to be a disciple, one of the inner twelve. He became well-known for healing people so when some men lowered a paralyzed man down through the roof everyone expected Jesus to heal him. But Jesus says, “your sins are forgiven.” He does things that seem to break the “rules,” like healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus curses a fig tree, causing it to dry up. He went into the Temple and had a fit of rage, overturning tables and driving people out. One time he was gathered with a group of people and a prostitute began to wipe Jesus’ feet with her hair. Jesus forgave her of her sins. The religious people there were outraged. He walked on water, he raised the dead, he touched people with contagious diseases. And his closest friends and followers weren’t even able to figure out what he was going to do next. That’s what we find in this reading from John 13.

Verse 1 says, “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.” He had repeatedly told his disciples this very thing and somehow they still didn’t expect it. And then when they had

gathered for the Passover supper Jesus gets up and begins to wash their feet.

In those days everyone wore sandals and they walked everywhere they went on dusty roads. You can imagine how dirty their feet would get. So it was customary when you were invited into someone’s home that they would have a servant wash your feet. This was a job usually reserved for the lowest servant. It was the job nobody wanted. It was humiliating to say the least. I suspect it’s a job that none of you would want, either. Imagine the confusion when Jesus gets up, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around his waist and begins to wash their feet. *He was their boss and they were pretty sure he was the Messiah, the King!* Once again Jesus’ actions, and his words for that matter, didn’t seem to make sense.

The truth is that you and I aren’t any better at figuring out what Jesus would do. That’s because what Jesus would do is so radically different from what we would do. Jesus has the advantage of being God. We don’t! So when we try to figure out what Jesus would do, we really end up figuring out what we would *like* Him to do. We end up using Jesus for our own personal or political purposes. Once we think we have Jesus figured out we think we can “tame” him. He becomes “safe.” Once we think we can say, “this is what Jesus would do,” we have begun to create an idol, to create a god (little g) in OUR image.

There’s a great scene in the book *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, the first book in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. In the series, Jesus is represented by the lion Aslan. While in Narnia, the children meet Mr and Mrs Beaver, who describe Aslan to them:

“Is he a man?” asked Lucy.

“Aslan a man!” said Mr Beaver sternly. Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond- the-sea. Don’t you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great lion.”

“ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake” said Mrs Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Today many Christians think of Jesus as sort of like Mister Rogers. He’s safe and mild-mannered. The reality is that he’s not safe at all. But he’s good. It’s dangerous for us, then, to try to figure out what Jesus would do in the situations of our life. The question we need to ask is not, “what would Jesus do?” but rather, what did Jesus actually *tell me* to do? Would that make a catchy bracelet? WDJATMTD.

Here in our passage he says, “If I then, your Lord and 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 to you.” I don’t think this means we are to take this literally and spend our days washing

each other’s feet. The washing of feet was the lowly, menial task of the day. It was one of the most humiliating ways to serve people. Jesus says, “you should treat each other with this kind of humility.” As he says later, “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.” That’s our job. To serve others.

So what did Jesus actually command us to do? In Matthew 22 we find what has become known as the Great Commandment. Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” He tells us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit those in prison. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

If you continue reading in John 13 Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” We expect Jesus to talk about love. But here’s the unexpected part, he demonstrates what real love is.

The cross is the image of true love. Despite what our culture tries to tell you, love is not a *feeling*. Loving us cost God something. Love means humility and sacrifice. Love means giving up something. Love means being willing to wash feet, or whatever else is needed. It means doing what Jesus commanded us to do. It’s WDJATMTD. And it’s a blessing. “If you know these things, blessed are you if you *do* them.” May we do them and be blessed.

Amen