

Saint Andrew's Daily Lenten Discipline 2026

Walking the Palm Sunday Path

Week Four, March 15-22

John 13:1-9; 33-35

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 decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper³ 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 supper, 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 reclined again, 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, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than 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 close to his heart;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 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 Judeans 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.”

Synopsis Week 4: John 13:1–9, 33–35 Footwashing and the New Commandment

The path Jesus blazes at Palm Sunday is not only about public witness and the struggles against powerful systems and oppressive realities. It is also a path that leads us closer to one another in the process. When Jesus is alone with his followers, he illustrates the stark contrast between the values that undergird his vision for a restored society on one hand and the strategies of those who use power to dominate on the other hand. He characterizes his path as one of service and humility when he commands his followers to imitate him by washing one another’s feet, surrendering status and advantage for the sake of someone else, even if it involves serving just one person at a time.

Jesus goes on to urge his followers to be known for the love they have for one another. The images of humble kingship he displayed at Palm Sunday remain apparent here in the last night he shares with his friends. He celebrates the dignity and worth of each person. The Palm Sunday Path calls us to offer self-giving love.

John 13:1–9, 33–35 Commentary: Karoline Lewis

Of all the things Jesus could have done on his last night with his followers before his arrest, trial, and death—indoctrination, suggestions of insurrection, encouragement to incitement—he washes their feet.

The opposite of payback

But not just the feet of his allies. He also washes the feet of the one who will betray him before the meal is even over, Judas (John 13:30), and the one who will deny being one of his disciples, Peter (John 18:17, 25, 27). In fact, at the very same time Jesus is on trial before the high priest and is slapped across the face when he speaks truth, Peter denies the truth. “Aren’t you one of that man’s followers?” and Peter responds, “I am not” (John 18:17).

You see, Jesus does not reward his faithful or penalize the faithless. He does not make false promises or offer grandiosities in the face of what the disciples will surely witness. And the “love commandment” (John 13:31–35) is not some quid pro quo edict or transactional theology. That is not how Jesus’s kingdom works. No, Jesus shows his disciples abundant love exactly when faithfulness is and will be the most difficult. He shows them love to the *n*th degree when they will no doubt wonder how love can possibly win. Jesus loves his disciples to the end (13:1) with an outpouring of grace upon grace, not as a go-and-do-likewise “last stand” kind of directive, but as an action that will literally save their lives. Love will keep them together.

Not about Jesus—it's about them

Jesus's last night with his friends is not about him but about **them**—and what life on the ground and in the world without him will look like. Jesus neither loves the disciples so as to be adored or adulated in return, nor come to this night looking for a “love me back” loyalty. And the Farewell Discourse (chapters 14–17) is not a strategic plan or a bold projective outline for carrying out the “mission” of the Jesus movement.

Instead, at the center of it all, is a theology of humility. Hospitality takes on new meaning when Jesus hosts a meal of welcome into his home—the abode of relationship with him and God. Jesus reveals that in his realm, hospitality is no mere meal or subscription to a new social etiquette; it is intimate communion—that we may all be one. “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (17:21). The disciples are then charged with an invitation to oneness in the face of all the principalities and powers that would tear them apart.

Loving as Jesus was loved

Washing the feet of his disciples is an act that can so easily be turned into an abstraction, where love is reduced to command. Which is why we have to consider again that of all the things Jesus could have done on the last night with his friends—he loves as he was loved. When Mary anoints Jesus's feet (John 12:1–8) with abundant love—an extravagance matched only by Jesus's own acts of abundance—Jesus then takes Mary's love, holds on to her love, so that the next day, he can ride on a donkey, fanned with palm fronds and hosannas, toward the inevitability of empire's threatened ego.

Jesus loves without condemnation, without expectation, because he has been lavishly loved into the future he knows must happen. According to John, love is what makes Palm Sunday possible. Jesus then showers the love he has received and the love he knows on his disciples so they may share this love with each other and with the world God loves. Love is what will get the disciples through it all, as it will Jesus. Because love is the very heart of the incarnation.

Incarnation as an experience of love

The incarnation is not, in the end, a doctrine to defend or a proclamation in search of proof. The incarnation is the experience of love, being in the presence of love, a love that incorporates the entire cosmos. “For God so loved the world” is not a euphemism or pithy saying we get to put on a plaque and hang wherever it makes us feel good. **Love is everything.** Love is “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). And love is “And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (1:14).

It is love who bends down to wash the feet of those who will need to remember what unconditional love feels like—now, as they watch a friend walk away and hear of another's denial, and when the police come to execute an unjust arrest.

It is love who goes to the garden, to his arrest, to his trial, and to the cross.

It is with love and because of love that, from the cross, Jesus can look down at his tear-filled mother and the disciple whom he desperately loves. And his words from the cross are not about a great reckoning or retaliation. There is no judgment and there can be no judgment, because “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him” (3:17).

Only love can see how communities bound together in and through love will be the light of the world (9:5) when Jesus returns to the Father. The disciples will need to love each other so as to bear the betrayal of their closest friends, to watch Jesus exit the garden willingly, handing over his life for their lives, and to witness what empire does: kill those who give life. Because nothing can be borne without love.

We love one another to survive in a world where unchecked power and its minions are hellbent against love.

A simple act transformed

It is such a simple act: to wash the feet of a guest at your table. But Jesus takes a standard, societal display of welcome and transforms it into the deliberateness of servanthood. It is an act that upends all notions of power and status. It embodies a way of being in the world in which revenge and retribution are replaced with reciprocal love.

For John, the pathway to Palm Sunday is not possible without mutual love. And not a love in word alone, but in acts that require presence and physical touch. Acts that risk misinterpretation and misappropriation. Acts that result in resistance and disbelief. Because few can believe how much love can and will motivate communities to **be** love in and for the world.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching-series/walking-the-palm-sunday-path-in-lent-a-sermon-series-for-2026>