



*“HD: THE BELOVED COMMUNITY”

Biblical Text: [John 13: 4-8, 12-17, 34-35](#)

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**We are all headed somewhere. And your journey led you here today. I’ve often wondered why you come. It is likely to be for hundreds of different reasons. For some, it’s habit. Some are here for our kids or grandkids. *And some of our kids are here because they want to be – and some because you wouldn’t let them sleep in. Which, by the way, is true for the adults too. *You know it is!

*You might have come today to connect with friends, or a Sunday School class or Life Group. Maybe you’re here seeking peace in a stressful and crazy world. But you’re here. Maybe you are here to celebrate *Veteran’s Day or to see what I’m going to say about the latest *Church shooting, in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Have mercy!

*As a pastor, let me say this, whatever the reason, I’m glad you’re here. *And I’m glad to be here too. **I’m** here, like the rest of our staff, because it’s our job. But I’ll let you in on a secret - nobody does Church work for long, if that’s all there is. *It isn’t all grins and giggles. We are looking for something more than that. And underneath, at the level of our humanity, you are here looking for something more, too.

We are all here because we need something deeper to trust than the *daily news. Like the people around us, and the disciples long ago, we need something to believe in. Like them, we need hope. ***And hope is a choice we make.**

Veterans know about choosing to hope. *When you serve far away from home, when you are putting your life on the line for your country, you need something to believe in. If you know families where spouses, children, or grandchildren are serving, or have served, *let them know you are thinking of them and praying for them. And contrary to the popular “tweets” of the hour, prayer is important!

*My father rarely talked about his service in World War II, other than to once say something I have never forgotten. He said, **“Those who have seen war close at hand, know how important it is to work and pray for peace.”*

I don’t know if he originated those words or was quoting someone. But I believe in and am inspired by the words even today. We are called to work and pray and hope!

*And, in fact, Jesus called his disciples to build a community of such peace and hope and love, that *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called it **“The Beloved Community.”* And one of the Bible passages about that kind of community is our text from John 13. *

So, open your Bibles, or refer to your bulletin, where we find these words, **(Jesus) got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to *wash the disciples' feet...** (John 13:4-5)¹

*It was a servant's act, and not a pleasant job in a dusty county where there was no pavement, lots of sheep, and where they walked everywhere they went.

*After he was finished, Jesus asked the disciples a probing question. Look at John 13:12: **(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 for you?')**²

He is still asking today, ** "Do you know what I have done for you?"**

And what has he done? *Brought hope to us, from heaven to earth! He showed us the nature of the love of God. He gave his life for our forgiveness and salvation. He taught us how to build bridges between people rather than walls. He called us to trust in God and rather than wealth or power or might. And he promised us that neither life or death could separate us from the hope of God.

He did all of that. But he did something else. *In John 13:15, he told his disciples: **"I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."**³

*He expected his disciples, as he expects us, to be servants, and servant-leaders. We are to take our cue from him. To live as he lived, to bring hope to those he served – the poor, the lonely, the child, the outcast, the forgotten. **And to love as he loved!**

This most of all! In John 13:34, he told them, **"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."**⁴

*Whatever is going on "out there," the world from which we come when we come here and the one to which we go when we leave, that's why we come. For the experience of a loving God and a loving people. We are not perfect at it, God knows, but where else do we have a better chance to find the *Beloved Community*?

People need to know we are not alone. We need to know there is something larger than ourselves. We need the love of God. Here, at least, we can aspire to live in hope and not hatred. Here we can trade our judgemental attitudes for the way of justice. Here we can surrender our fears to the power of the love of God.

¹ John 12:4-5, New Revised Standard Version Bible. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Ibid. John 13:12, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

³ Ibid. John 13:15, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

⁴ Ibid. John 13:34, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

This is our calling. *In John 13:35, he told them, **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*⁵ By this we shall be known.

Not by our buildings, as beautiful as those may be. Not by our wealth, although we have to pay our bills and support our ministries. **But by our love.**

*So, let us seek to be the Beloved Community, not all thinking alike, but seeking to understand one another. Not seeking uniformity of opinion, as if that were ever possible, but seeking always to serve one another, and to see Jesus in each other.

Why? Because we love in a world that needs someone to do so. We live in a world yearning for hope. Where people live in fear. Where prescription painkillers are literally killing us. Where guns and gun violence have opened Pandora’s Box and children and parents and grandparents fear for our safety.

Where our politicians refuse to cross the aisle or even cross the street to work together for the common good. Where too many of us choose to post or tweet our criticism than joining hands and working together. Where someone, for the love of God, needs to do something. And because we can. Do something.

And most of all, because love, like hope, is a choice we make!

And I John 4:19 says, *“We love because he first loved us.”*⁶

And I John 4:20 says, *“Whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”*⁷

And I John 4:21 says, *“The commandment we have from Jesus is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”*⁸

But above all, because Jesus said this:

*“By this they will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*⁹

Amen.

⁵ Ibid. John 13:35, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

⁶ 1 John 4:19, New International Version of the Bible.[®] Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.[®] Used by permission.

⁷ Ibid. 1 John 4:20, New International Version Bible.

⁸ Op. Cit. 1 John 4:21, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

⁹ John 13:35, paraphrased by the author.