

Whenever I'm presented with the Gospel of John,
I take a deep sigh.
I, personally, find the Gospel of John very difficult.
I'm flooded with thoughts like:
this Gospel is really hard;
I don't know if I'll ever understand it.
My thinking goes rigid and I feel overwhelmed.
I want to understand this Gospel;
I want to be nourished by this Word.
And, goodness, it feels like a hard Word to receive.

I have a prayer that I keep close written by Katrina Kenison.
It begins:
"When the going gets tough may I resist my first impulse to wade in,
fix, explain, resolve, and restore.
May I sit down instead.
When the going gets tough may I be quiet.
May I steep for a while in stillness..."
I keep the prayer close
because I tend towards a high level of intensity.
This can be beneficial, bending my heart towards loyal friendship.
This can be harmful, bending my heart towards perfectionism.
The prayer reminds me to try and hold my life loosely,
to not take myself so seriously.
I hope this prayer teaches me to rest,
to bend my heart towards trust and faithfulness.

My approach to today's Gospel was not helping me.
I was working too hard,
demanding the Gospel work as hard as I was.
Meanwhile, the story invited me close,
to quiet myself,
to listen.
As I began to listen,
I remembered:
there's more to the story than what we have here.

Jesus is gathered with the disciples in the Upper Room
for a meal.
Judas has already decided to betray Jesus.
Jesus knows this
and that *the hour of his departure* (the crucifixion) is near.
Jesus also knows
(not believes, knows)
that God has *given all things into his hands*.
His life is God's life.
He is the Incarnate Word, divine life given to creation.
There is nothing that can separate him from God.
And his life, every bit of it, even his death,
bears the redeeming work of God into the world.

Jesus, then, is not afraid;
he does not hide;
he does not protect himself from Judas.

This is what he does

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to
the end...

And during supper 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
and to wipe them with the towel...

Jesus performs an intimate act of service,
in the middle of dinner.

This last meal in John's Gospel is not bread and wine;
it is foot washing.

Can we imagine?

I wonder what the atmosphere was like in the Upper Room.

Was Jesus the only one anticipating the cross?

And what about the footwashing?

What meaning does this moment,
this last meal,

hold for the community of John's Gospel?

After Jesus washes their feet,
he begins to teach the disciples.

He tells them:

“Very truly, I tell you,
whoever receives one whom I send receives me;
and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.””

In other words, just as he is bound to God,
they are bound to him.

Just as his life is God’s life,
the disciples’ lives reveal Christ.

Just as he bears God’s redeeming work into the world,
so do they.

He unites his life to theirs.

He empowers them to live as he has lived,

to wash one another’s feet.

Into this story enters the reality of Judas' betrayal.
Jesus publicly refers to the betrayal,
troubling the disciples.
Then, he sends Judas out,
to finish what he has begun.

Jesus is clear:
Judas' betrayal is essential.
It is Judas' betrayal that leads to his death.
His death is his glory:

the way of redemption is the way of the cross.

Jesus' offering of himself, of God's self,
is the way of God's redeeming work in the world.

I suppose anyone could have betrayed Jesus.
What does it mean that one of his disciples betrayed him?
How does Judas' betrayal contrast with Jesus' foot washing?

Only now do we come to today's short passage from the Gospel.
There's a lot in these few verses.

I wonder what matters most to you.
Is there any part of this passage we could leave out
and still have the same meaning?
Is there any verse that is essential to our understanding?

Peter becomes focused on Jesus' departure.
Understandably, he wonders where Jesus is going
and why can't he come along.
Of course, this conversation only leads to Jesus
predicting Peter's betrayal of him.

Even then, though, Jesus focuses on comforting the disciples.
For the next three chapters,
Jesus will go on to assure them.
He teaches them about the Advocate, the Spirit,
who will be with them and comfort them.
He binds their discipleship to himself,
using the image of the vine and branches (Jn 15:1 ff).
He assures them that their pain will lead to joy (Jn 16: 30).
And then, he prays for them,
entrusting the disciples and their ministry to God (Jn 17:1 ff).

While the disciples grow more and more agitated,
Jesus centers himself in love:
his love for them
and his commandment that they love one another.

This is what matters most to me:
Jesus' commandment that we love one another.

Of course, love can be and has been trivialized.
Said in passing, on a whim, it can feel like a platitude.

The love Jesus enacts, though, is anything but trivial.

Here he is kneeling at the feet of his friends.
Here he is feeding his betrayer.
Here he is praying for comfort and joy for disciples
who will betray him at this death.
Here he is risking death for a community that rejects his love.
When the going gets tough, Jesus loves;

and he calls us to do the same.

The love Jesus expresses for creation
is a love that shows up at all times and in all places.
This love changes water into wine,
heals the paralytic,
and feeds the five thousand.

It is not afraid.
It takes risks.

The love of Jesus rests in what is, right now,
and leans towards mercy.
This is the love God, our creator, has for us.
This is a word I can receive:
into my heart, my mind, and my life.

When the going gets tough,
I invite us to lean into the love of Christ.

May we, first, speak love and kindness to *ourselves*.
Let us rest in the assuredness of God's grace and mercy - at all times.

May that love, the love of Christ that resides in us,
empower us to love others.

May our instinct be to serve, not to control or fix how we see fit.
Let us rest in the assurance that we have all we need,
right here, right now.

May that peace, the peace of Christ, encourage us - at all times.

By this, we will know Christ and make him known.