**September 26, 2021 Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**John 13:1-10a**

**“Revelations and Exclamations: Our Path Forward”**

**Douglas T. King**

 I am a big fan of mystery shows on television. Vera, Midsommar Murders, and my personal favorite, Columbo are all delightful. There is nothing like the satisfaction of having a situation wrapped up neatly with a bow after an hour and a half. So little of life is like that. One of the more stylish murder mystery series that I watch is Balthazar which is filmed in France. My wife Marta can follow some of the French Dialogue but I am completely lost. Thank God for English subtitles.

Sometimes I wish we had subtitles for some of the conversations in our life. “How are you?” Subtitle Translation: You look like you are struggling. “No, I’m fine.” Subtitle Translation: I am struggling but I do not want to admit that to you. “Okay, just let me know if I can help with anything.” Subtitle Translation: I wish you would share your burdens with me. “Thanks. I’m fine.” Subtitle Translation: I need you to believe that I am perfect. Perfectly capable of handling everything in my life, always and forever. I wonder how many times each of us has been on one end or the other of this conversation.

 This Sunday is the third and final sermon in a series entitled, “Exclamations and Revelations: The Journey Toward Faithfulness.” The first week we heard Bartimaeus exclaim, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” and we were reminded of our predicament, we need God. The second week we heard Jacob exclaim, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it.” And we were reminded of our location by God’s side in all times. This week we hear an exclamation from Peter to Jesus, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” And we will consider how we move forward in faithfulness.

We cannot say we are surprised when we hear an exclamation come pouring out of Peter’s mouth. In the gospels Peter is known for two traits, his lack of perception and his abundant enthusiasm. At least in this case, his enthusiasm is actually attached to a wise insight.

Our text from John is a part of the farewell discourse the night Jesus will be arrested and led away. This is Jesus’ last chance to share with his disciples before he is crucified. In the other gospel accounts of these waning moments we are told of the last supper. John chooses instead to give us this story of the foot washing. Both the last supper and the foot washing are intimate acts and the last physical interaction Jesus will have with his disciples before he dies. The act of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet could have easily become a sacrament as well.

A reminder of the context is helpful as we approach this scene. Foot washing was a common practice throughout the Mediterranean world in that time. Gail O’Day notes that it had three main functions, personal hygiene, an act of hospitality, and a cultic act. (O’Day, p. 722) Walking in sandals on dusty, dirty roads left people with filthy feet. Upon entering a home one was often offered a bowl of water to wash their own feet or a servant would wash their feet. When Jesus offers to wash the disciples’ feet he is functioning as a servant to them and as a host, which is much of the way we hear him function in the other gospels at the last supper. It is Jesus who breaks the bread and passes the cup.

Often when we read this text we focus upon Jesus modeling humble service to others which we are called to emulate. And Jesus certainly calls us to follow his example and serve others. But that is not all that is going on in this text. One of the critical themes that we find in the gospel of John is the intimacy between Jesus, and God, and each one of us. Later this night Jesus will announce, “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

In the dialogue between Jesus and Peter we hear a struggle for intimacy. After Peter’s refusal to have Jesus wash his feet, Jesus tells him, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” Peter pushes back again and Jesus responds, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” And then good old ever confused but ever enthusiastic Peter loudly exclaims, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” And Jesus clarifies for him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean…”

So what is going on between Jesus and Peter? Let’s start with Peter’s initial and repeated refusal of Jesus’ offer to wash his feet. This is the “I’m fine” conversation I referred to at the beginning of the sermon. It is a characteristic of our human nature that we often deflect any acknowledgment that we possess weakness. I suppose we fear the vulnerability it demonstrates. If we possess weakness we are not perfect and if we are imperfect what does that say about us? But what does Jesus’ response to Peter of not understanding now but he will later mean? And what does it mean he will have no share with Jesus?

We cannot be in relationship with Jesus unless we can get beyond saying “I’m fine” which is code for I do not need anything from anyone. First of all it is not true. And you do not build relationships on that which is not true. To “have share” with Jesus is to be in intimate relationship with him, to share all of who you are with him that he may share himself with you.

So why does Jesus say that Peter will not get all of this just yet but he will later? Some say it is because Jesus on the cross will reveal that salvation is only to be found through being our most vulnerable, as vulnerable as God who slowly dies upon a cross. But I hear something else as well. Intimate relationships take not only truth but time. It is only as we share our vulnerability day after day, week after week, year after year, that we truly gain intimacy.

So how about Jesus’ remarking that it is only the feet that he needs to wash and not the hands and the head. The hands and the head are the highly esteemed parts of Peter. It is his feet that carry the detritus of the day, picked up off of the street, they are the humblest part of Peter. Every day they will get filthy again. Every day they will need to be washed once more.

If we want a share with Jesus, if we want to be in relationship with him, we cannot say, “I’m fine” we need to honestly share every bump and bruise we have suffered and every imperfection we bear. And this is not some onetime thing. This is part of the fabric of our everyday living, coming to God in prayer and admitting our imperfection, and asking God to heal us and sustain us. It is the only way to be in intimate relationship with Jesus, to have a share with him.

We as the church, the body of Christ, are called to the same intimacy with each other. We are called to reach beyond the “I’m fine” conversations with each other, called to share our vulnerabilities, called to share our burdens and our journey together that God’s Spirit may flourish between and among us.

In this sermon series we have explored our predicament, our location, and now our way forward. First we heard Bartimaeus exclaim, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And we learned that this was an exclamation recognizing that we and the world are not self-sufficient, we are in need of God. Then we heard Jacob, alone and on the run, exclaim, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” We learned that though we may indeed have a need for God, we need not fear, because God is always present with us.” And today we heard the exclamation of Peter, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” We learn that if wish to find salvation we must come before God and honestly admit our imperfection and we must continue to do this throughout our lives.

Our spiritual journey will never be wrapped up as cleanly as a Columbo mystery. But, trench coat or not, we can boil it down to several basics. Number one, we need God. Number two, God is always with us. And number three, if we share our imperfections with God and with each other we will share in all Jesus and his church have to offer.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

O’Day, Gail R., The New Interpreter’s Bible, volume IX,

 Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995.