

The Gospel of John

Session 8

John 13:1—16:4a

I. John 13:1-11

1. Jesus' "hour" has now come (13:1) and this "hour" is the New Passover, the New Exodus which is God's final act of salvation. This "hour" involves Jesus' departure from the world and his return to the Father. In coming to this "hour," Jesus has loved "his own" "to the completeness of love". Most English translations render the end of 13:1 as "he loved them to the end" but the word "end" here is an inadequate rendering of the Greek word *telos* which means something like "completion" or "fulfillment". Jesus' "hour" is the hour of the fullness of God's love.
2. Against Jesus in this "hour" is not Judas or "the Jews" but the devil (13:2). The devil wishes to destroy Jesus and enlists the help of human agents in doing so. This effort reveals the fact that he understands neither the love of God nor God's power. Jesus, however, knows that the Father has given "all things" over to him and that he is sovereign over the events of his death. He is not a powerless victim but gives himself over to death knowing that nothing can finally overcome him (13:3).
3. During the Passover meal, Jesus engages in a symbolic action which offers an interpretation of his "hour". This is a symbolic pre-enactment of his Passion. The washing of feet was a gesture of hospitality, but this task was generally performed by slaves or people of low social status. Therefore, the fact that Jesus assumed this role would have been shocking. This act of service accompanied by the stripping away of Jesus' outer garment (13:4), certainly symbolizes his death and interprets it as an act of service and love.
4. The shocking nature of Jesus' actions are reflected in what Peter says in 13:6. Peter's question is a challenge (made even more firm in 13:8). Jesus makes it clear that the disciples will not understand what he is doing now but that understanding will come later (13:7). Because this act of service represents Jesus' self-oblation, Peter must submit to it. Jesus' self-oblation makes possible a spiritual cleansing, a cleansing which makes one pure ("completely clean"). Of course, not all of the disciples are "clean" (13:10). Not all of them will submit to the cleansing power of Jesus' death. 13:11 reminds us that Jesus is betrayed not by "the Jews" or the Romans but by one of his own disciples.

II. John 13:12-20

1. Jesus now makes it clear that the disciples are to follow the pattern symbolized in act of humble service. Jesus has performed an act which is below his status and the disciples are to do likewise. The community of disciples is to be a place of self-sacrificial love. If Jesus is not above serving, they are not either (13:14-15).
2. Jesus' actions have set a pattern for the disciples. They are not to think in terms of status and being "above" certain things. If their master has become a servant, they should assume the same posture (13:16)
3. Not all the disciples will assume this posture. Citing Psalm 41:10 in 13:18, Jesus notes that someone who has shared bread with him will act to betray him. Jesus tells them of this beforehand so that when it takes place their faith will not be affected (13:19).
4. 13:20 makes it clear that the pattern of sending continues with the disciples. The Father sends the Son, and the Son will send the Spirit. Finally, the disciples will be sent such that to receive them is to receive

them is to receive Jesus and the One who sent him. The sending of the disciples can only be understood within the context of the sending of the Son and the Spirit (note 20:19-23).

III. John 13:21-30

1. The subject of betrayal has already been introduced (13:10-11) but now comes into focus. Once again, Jesus is “troubled” (cf. 11:33). He announces that the betrayer will be one of the disciples.
2. We are introduced to the “beloved disciple” in 13:23 who has a special status. The position of this disciple at the Passover meal suggests that he is the host and that Jesus is the guest of honor. This presence at Jesus’ side (13:25) suggests both physical and spiritual proximity to Jesus in that Jesus is described as being at the Father’s side in 1:18.
3. Peter motions for the beloved disciple to ask Jesus about the identity of the betrayer. Jesus identifies this figure in 13:26 which refers, once again, to Psalm 41:10. The betrayer is someone who has shared intimate fellowship with Jesus.
4. 13:2 notes that the devil had already tempted Judas to betray Jesus. 13:27 seems to indicate that Judas now gives consent to this and allows the devil to enter into him. Judas’ betrayal is not simply an individual act. Note that Jesus grants permission for Judas to betray him in 13:27 and this emphasizes his sovereignty over unfolding events. Jesus is not overtaken by events but is, rather, sovereign over them.
5. Judas goes out into the night (13:30). This is not simply a statement about the time of day but also a statement of his spiritual condition. Judas leaves the presence of Jesus and enters into the darkness.

IV. John 13:31-38

1. With the departure of Judas, the Farewell Discourse begins (13:31—17:26). The glory of God is revealed in the Cross for here God is revealed as self-giving love. The Father gives the Son over to death and the Son surrenders himself to death (he is not passive at any moment). The Son acts out of love for the Father. The Father is glorified in the Son (13:31) and the Father will glorify the Son in the resurrection (13:32).
2. Jesus is preparing the disciples for the time when he is physically absent. Jesus has told “the Jews” that he is going away (8:21) but they mistakenly interpreted this to mean that he was leaving Judea (7:32-36). Jesus is not simply going to a distant geographical location but to the Father (13:33).
3. Jesus now gives a “new commandment” (13:34). The disciples are to practice the self-giving love which Jesus has just shown them. This is not simply a matter of following Jesus’ example or teaching. To follow Jesus’ pattern, one must abide in him. The law of love (note Romans 13:8-10) is not simply a law but presupposes a continuing relationship with Jesus.
4. It becomes clear that the disciples do not understand Jesus for Peter clearly thinks that Jesus is simply changing geographical location (13:36). Peter cannot follow Jesus now because he is going to the Father to prepare a way. Peter will only follow later when Jesus has made this possible. Peter’s stated intention of laying his life down for Jesus both humanly unlikely and theologically impossible (13:38). Peter will betray Jesus in a difficult moment, and it is theologically impossible for Peter to lay down his life for Jesus. All depends on the reverse taking place.

V. John 14:1-7

1. Jesus makes it clear that his departure should not trouble the disciples. He is referring to the distress experienced when one is near to death. Instead, they should trust God and the One whom he has sent. Trusting the Father and the Son, relying on their reliability, is the essence of faith.
2. Where is Jesus going? He is going to the Father so that those who follow him may come to the Father as well. Jesus has already spoken of the temple as his father's "house" and has spoken of himself as the true temple (2:16, 20). Jesus is going to the Father in order to make it possible for people to enter into communion with God. Coming to the Father is entering into communion with him through the Son and the Spirit (13:2-3).
3. Once again, Jesus is misunderstood to be speaking about going to some place (this time by Thomas). And once again, Jesus has to make it clear that he is not speaking of geographical movement. Jesus is himself the way to God because in him the truth about God is revealed. To come to him is to have Life (13:6).

VI. John 14:8-14

1. Now a third disciple (after Peter and Thomas) misunderstands Jesus. Philip seems to want a theophany, an open manifestation of God (such as that on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 33:8). Jesus makes it clear that Philip does not know him for the Father is revealed in the Son (14:9, cf. 1:18). The Son is the Father's self-revelation. Faith involves the trust that the Father and the Son are inseparable (14:10). To know the Son is to know the Father because the Father "dwells" in the Son and does his works through him (14:10).
2. Jesus' works are performed as the result of the close communion between the Father and the Son. When Jesus goes to the Father, he will send the Spirit to unite the disciples to himself (14:16-17) and this union will result in Jesus' works being performed in them. This will glorify Jesus. The life of the Church will bear witness to him and so Jesus' works will become "greater" (not confined to a single person).
3. The communion between Jesus and the disciples will also be made manifest in their prayer life. They will offer prayer in Jesus' name in union with him which means that they will pray in obedience to the Father. Because they will pray in union with Jesus, he will grant their requests, and this will glorify the Father (14:13; cf. Romans 8:26-27). It is important to not misread 14:14 as promising that anything we pray for will be given to us. Prayer is the fruit of genuine communion with Jesus and this communion conforms us to him. Just as the Son loves the Father and loves to do his will, disciples will love the Son and will love to do his will. This is what they will seek in prayer.

VII. John 14:15-24

1. It may seem counterintuitive to us, but in John love and obedience go together. Genuine love of God leads to (joyful) obedience to God. This obedience has been mentioned in 13:34. Note that the disciples' relationship to Jesus mirrors the Son's relationship to the Father. Just as the love of God is revealed in the Son, so the love of the Son is revealed in his disciples.
2. Jesus' going to the Father is good news for the reason stated in 14:16. Jesus will as the Father and he will send "another Helper [or Advocate]" (14:16). This is the "Spirit of truth". The Spirit is "another Helper" because the Son is a "Helper" as well. The ministry of the Son and the Spirit must be seen as mutually supplementing one another. The Spirit is distinct from Jesus but not separate from him. The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it does not know the Son. The Spirit is the Father's gift to those who have faith in the Son. While Jesus will be physically absent (his human nature will be in the Presence

of God), the Spirit will dwell with and in the Church. Through the Spirit, disciples will be able to abide in Jesus.

3. While Jesus is going to the Father, he promises to come to the disciples (14:18). After his resurrection, Jesus will live and through the gift of the Spirit the disciples will live also. As he abides with them after his resurrection, the disciples will know that Jesus truly has communion with the Father because he will share his communion with the Father with them (through the Spirit). Instead of Jesus' departure being a loss, it will actually create a new intimacy with God: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20).
4. Those who keep Jesus' commandments (those who have an obedience producing faith) can be identified as those who love Jesus. There is a difference between nominal faith and genuine faith which is motivated by love, consists in communion with God and bears the fruit of obedience. It is important to notice that love here is a source of knowledge (14:21). We know what we love such that true knowledge is predicated upon love and true knowledge deepens love.
5. This point is made clearly in 14:23-24. Love yields obedience and obedience yields true knowledge of and communion with God. Stated negatively, lack of love yields lack of obedience and lack of obedience yields closure to the truth.

VIII. John 14:25-31

1. Much of what Jesus has said will be incomprehensible to the disciples. This is because much of what he says can only be comprehended after his "hour". We learn that the Holy Spirit will bring about the needed understanding—it will not be a human attainment. Having sent the Son, the Father will send the Spirit in Jesus' name (14:26). Remember that in 14:16 the Father will send the Spirit at Jesus' request. The Son plays a role in the sending of the Spirit.
2. Note that the mission of the Spirit is not to reveal new things but to remind the disciples (the Church) of what has been revealed in Jesus. The Spirit is sent as a witness to the Son. The Spirit leads the Church into an ever-deeper encounter with the Son and all that the Father has done and revealed in him. The disciples are not let to figure out what has been revealed.
3. Jesus bestows peace upon the disciples (14:27). This is not simply a private, inward sense of all being well. In the Old Testament, peace is an eschatological gift (Jeremiah 33:6-9) and has the sense of restored order based upon the love of God. Jesus calls the disciples to a confident trust in God which is the source of true peace. Apart from this trust, there can be no peace. The "world" cannot supply this peace for it has turned away from trusting God. It might supply a temporary peace (based upon military or economic security) but such a peace is only temporary and can be easily taken away. It is not lasting.
4. Jesus' return to the disciples (14:28) has two dimensions. First, he will return to them through the Spirit. Jesus' return to the Father (14:28) does not mean that he is simply going away. Second, there is his Parousia or return in glory. It is important to note that Jesus' "going away" (14:28), when correctly understood, is a cause for rejoicing.
5. Little remains for Jesus to say to the disciples because the "ruler of this world" approaches (14:30). The devil has already moved Judas to act and soon he will act through "the Jews" and the Romans to kill Jesus. But these actions will have no final effect on Jesus because he is not under the authority of the devil. Indeed, Jesus' "hour" will reveal the futility of the devil's cause. The devil has no power in this situation.
6. Jesus' love for the Father is revealed in his death (14:31). The Son's willingness to surrender his life reveals his perfect love for and trust in the Father. The Father's willingness to surrender his Son reveals his love for humankind. The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus reveal the inner-trinitarian life of God to be an act of love.

IX. John 15:1-8

1. Jesus speaks of the deep communion that will exist between he and the disciples. This communion is the inner reality of the Church. Jesus' claim to be the "true vine" is important since in the Old Testament the vine is Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). In 15:1, therefore, Jesus claims to be the True Israel. Jesus is the True Israel and those who "abide" in him are his branches and so part of the True Israel. The True Israel consists of those who have entered into the shared communion of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
2. Disciples who do not produce the fruit of love (those who do not keep Jesus' commandment as in 13:34) are removed while those who do bear fruit are "pruned" (15:2). The purpose of this pruning is to enable the vine to bear more fruit (15:2). The Greek verb translated as "prune" can also mean "purify". Branches (disciples) can only bear fruit if they remain attached to the vine. Note the number of times some form of "abide" is used to make this point (15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10). The relationship between Jesus and the disciples is made clear: "I am the vine; you are the branches" (15:5). Jesus is the indispensable source of life and empowerment and there can be no genuine discipleship apart from him. Disciples who do not abide in Jesus simply wither as "branches" and nothing can be done with them except to throw them into the fire (15:6). Most probably, this is an image for eschatological judgment. What else can be done with vines which refuse to be vines and bear no fruit?
3. Disciples who abide in Jesus will bear "much fruit" (15:5) because he is the source of fruitfulness. Note the emphasis on mutual abiding: "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (15:5).
4. Abiding in Jesus is both sustained by prayer and fosters prayer (15:7). To abide in Jesus is to share in his love for and obedience to the Father. This means that one's prayer will be in accordance with God's will. True prayer both reflects a human will conformed to God's and brings this conformity about. Just as God has been glorified in the witness of Jesus, so he will be glorified in the witness of the disciples (15:8).

X. John 15:9-17

1. Jesus loves the disciples with the same self-sacrificial and eternal love with which the Father loves him. Disciples enter in the communion that exists between Father and Son. Just as the Son lives out his perfect love for the Father in perfect "obedience" (the Son is not simply "following orders"), so disciples live out their love for the Son by keeping his commandment (15:12). The fruit of keeping this commandment, the fruit of abiding in Jesus, is that Jesus' joy will indwell the disciples and that their joy will attain completeness (15:11). Remaining in communion with Jesus and keeping his commandment are organically related and mutually interdependent. Communion with Jesus makes it possible to keep his commandment and keeping his commandment brings one into communion with Jesus.
2. As has been noted, God's love is most radiantly displayed on the Cross (15:13). It is this love to which Jesus calls the disciples, a love that can only be the fruit of communion with God. The relationship of Jesus to the disciples is not that of master to slave in that the slave simply follows orders and may hate his or her master (15:15). The relationship between Jesus and his disciples is more like a relationship among friends in that friends do things for one another out of love (the Greek word for the love of friendship is *philia*). Slaves do not know the rationale for the orders they obey while friends act out of affection for one another (15:15). Jesus has given to the disciples all that he has heard from the Father and, therefore, they know the reason for abiding in Jesus.
3. Faith is a free gift of God (15:16) and not something anyone gives to him or herself. Having faith is not itself a meritorious act. But God gives the gift of faith with a charge, "go and bear fruit" (15:16). Disciples who abide in the Son and so abide in the Father will ask the Father to accomplish his purposes in their

lives and this will be granted to them (15:16). Note the discipleship is not a static thing but consists in entering into an ever-closer communion with God and an ever-greater bearing of fruit.

XI. John 15:18—16:4a

1. Jesus now tells the disciples that they must expect persecution (15:18-19). Here “the world” refers to humankind in rebellion against God. When the disciples encounter opposition, they need to remember that the world opposed Jesus before it opposed them. The world only loves those who join in its rebellion against God; it hates those who shine a light on this rebellion and call it into account.
2. The disciples have been chosen “out of the world” (15:19). This does not mean that they are to be removed to a “spiritual zone” but that they are not part of the world’s rebellion. Since a slave is not greater than his master, they are to expect persecution since Jesus was persecuted (15:20). The disciples are not to interpret the persecution directed against them as personal dislike. Persecution is rooted in the refusal of the world to know the One who sent Jesus.
3. If Jesus’ ministry had not taken place, the world would not be held guilty. But Jesus has revealed the Father and so the refusal to receive this revelation brings guilt. The refusal to believe Jesus is the refusal to believe in God (15:23). Jesus sees the reaction of the world as prophesied in Scripture. In 15:25 he cites Psalm 69:5.
4. In the midst of persecution, the disciples will not be left alone for the Spirit, whom Jesus will send from the Father (15:26), will bear witness about him. The Spirit will empower the witness of the Church over time making the witness of the Church possible.
5. The witness of the Church will not convince everyone. Those in rebellion against the Father will not be convinced. Some will persecute the Church and in doing so will think they are protecting “true religion” (16:2).