

faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Lk. 22.31,32).

Now Jesus is talking to the same Simon Peter after he has denied his Lord three times. Simon Peter who has been sifted as wheat, whose self-confidence has faltered, whose faith in himself has been shattered.

“Simon,” Jesus is saying, “Feed my lambs!” Did you hear that? Feed my lambs! Simon, I called you long ago to leave those fishing nets because I have work for you to do – and I haven’t given up on you! I still have work for you to do. Feed my lambs! Watch out for my little ones. They are precious to my heavenly Father – be sure to feed them!

“Take care of my sheep!” Remember, Simon, what I said about my sheep, the people who believe in me. I came so that they might have life and have it to the full (Jn 10.10). As the good shepherd I have laid down my life for them. “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also...” (v. 16). Simon, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep!

Then comes another prediction, for, though Simon has denied his Lord, the time will come when he will give his life for his Lord after all.

Reflect:

- Love and service... Do we love Jesus? or are we just admirers and “fellow-travellers”? What does our love of Jesus mean in practical terms? How does our love of Jesus flow into service?
- Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (13.34-35). In what ways does (or should) our love of one another flow through into action?
- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (3.16). By what service will people beyond the church come to know the love of God and believe in Jesus?



Studies for Home Groups
by Peter J Blackburn

5. LOVING AND SERVING

Reading: John 13.1-17 ; 21.1-23

The musical play, *Fiddler on the Roof*, pictures a Jewish community of Anatevka in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its picture of a community ruled by custom and tradition and suffering under Russian authority is based on the history of the time.

One tradition that becomes a key issue is arranged marriages. The thought that people might actually marry for love appears to be new. The wish of the younger generation to marry for love – without reference to financial advantage or racial origin – was an unthinkable barrier.

In spite of traditional wisdom, these marriages go ahead and even bring a strong challenge to the older generation. We hear Tevye asking Golda, his wife of many years, “Do you love me?” For her part, she seems uncertain. She hasn’t thought in such terms. She has been a faithful wife and mother, has cooked, washed, cleaned... but love?

In today’s culture it seems to go the other way around. We are saturated with sentimentality, romance and sensuality. We are overloaded with talk and professions of love. Yet we have an extraordinarily high rate of “relationship breakdown” – what we mean by “love” is too often shallow and self-centred. In any home establishment there are always jobs to be done, but we haven’t seen serving as an integral part of loving.

Reflect:

- What do people mean these days when they talk about “love”? What is the inherent weakness in the modern understanding of love? To what extent should love and service be related to one another?

Foot-Washing

Read: John 13.1-17.

In recording Jesus’ last night with his disciples, John focuses, not on the meal itself, but on Jesus’ teaching by word and example. He had come because “God so loved the world...” (Jn 3.16).

Right now the time of his death was at hand. That would be a sacrifice for all humankind. Yet its effect would operate for “whoever

believes in him”. When Jesus spoke about his own sheep, he made it clear that he had “other sheep” yet to be called (10.16). But now in chapter 13 we are told, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love” (13.1b).

Although betrayal was in Judas’ heart, he was present (v. 2). “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God” (v. 3).

The streets were dusty. They wore open sandals – no socks. Foot-washing was necessary. As a matter of honour, a host would provide a servant to wash his guests’ feet. They had no servant. As the disciples began to recline at table, their uncomfortable thought must have been, “I suppose one of us should be doing it, but who? Certainly not me!” And then the shock – Jesus chose to wash their feet!

Peter protested, “Are you going to wash my feet?... No, you shall never wash my feet” (vv. 6,8a). I mean to say, it’s just not right. After all, Jesus is our Teacher and Lord!

Peter, you don’t understand just now. “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (v. 8b).

“Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” (v. 9) Peter doesn’t understand, but he certainly wants to be wholly committed to Jesus.

But you don’t need a bath every time your feet are dirty – just a wash (v. 10). All except Judas are already clean – made clean by believing in Jesus.

Reflect:

- We become Christians by accepting Christ’s service – he died for me, for my sins. How ready are we to accept this service? To what extent do we object to having others “serving” us?
- Jesus “showed the full extent of his love” by willingly taking the role of a servant – not only in foot-washing, but all the way to the cross! In what ways can our love for one another be expressed in action?

Feed my Lambs

Read: John 21.1-19.

Already they had seen the risen Jesus. But what did it all mean? In a sense they were re-evaluating, not only their convictions about who Jesus was and what he had come to do, but their whole lives. What had

Jesus meant when he had called them to follow him? They had certainly followed him, had watched and listened, had learnt a great deal actually, and then... they had failed the exam! Yet the risen Lord Jesus had now said, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you”! The risen Jesus still had a claim over them, still had expectations for them!

When Peter said, “Who would like to go fishing?”, he was on the brink of a decision – would this be a casual outing? or a return to his old lifestyle? What’s it to be, fishing? or fishing for men?

The night’s fishing was an absolute disaster from the viewpoint of a professional. Then this “stranger” – who turns out to be Jesus – guides them to a big catch of 153 large fish!

When Jesus called Peter to follow, he had said, “I will make you fishers of men.” But now – what could he do? – even his old fishing skills seemed not so good any more! He really wanted to be with Jesus. But whatever could he say to Jesus? and what might Jesus say to him?

Jesus didn’t say to Peter, “I’m ashamed of you, Peter! Why didn’t you stay by me, like you said? I’ll never trust you again!” Nor did he say, “I told you so! I knew you wouldn’t keep by your promise!” In some ways Peter might have expected those kind of words from the Lord. Rebuke and dismissal might have seemed easier to take!

But instead Jesus says, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” Back behind those words lie all of Peter’s professions of loyalty. Matthew records Peter’s words like this, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will” (26.33). And now it’s as if Jesus is saying, “Remember your profession, Peter? Is your love really greater than the others?” Peter says nothing about the comparison, but insists, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Now Jesus could have said, “OK, Peter. So you have failed me. You sincerely wanted to love me with a commitment that was prepared even to die for me. But you didn’t make it. You are remorseful, and I’m glad to have you as one of my friends. But – sorry! I’ll never trust you again! The work still to be done is so important that it wouldn’t be fair to you, to me or to anyone!”

But it wasn’t like that at all!

Luke records that, before Peter had made his great profession of allegiance in the upper room, Jesus predicted, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you all as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your