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**John 13:1-17**

*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already decided that Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, would betray Jesus. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from supper, 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 that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,<sup>[b]</sup> but is entirely clean. And you<sup>[c]</sup> are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

*After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers<sup>[d]</sup> greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

Perhaps it's a feature of entering my forties, but lately, I've spent more time reflecting on the path that has led me to where I am today. Sometimes it is easy to do - for instance, I can trace my appreciation for home grown fruits and vegetables to my parents, who ran an apple orchard and farmers market during my childhood. Sometimes it takes a little more detective work. Why do I prefer Apple's system of computers and phones over PC and Android? I tend to be thrifty but cost has never been on Apple's side. Was their distinctive marketing the reason? Am I trying to emulate friends who were early adopters? I may never really know why I typed this sermon on a Macbook, with an Apple watch on my wrist, an iPhone at my side, knowing that I would be reading it this morning from our family iPad.

Uncovering my love of bikes falls somewhere in between these first two examples. My parents have told me that I didn't learn to balance on two wheels until my younger sister did it first, prompting me to hurry up and figure out how to ride a bike so that I wasn't left behind. So I didn't rush to be a cyclist. In fact I

rode hand-me-downs or cheaper department store bikes all the way up through college, until I fell in with the wrong crowd. (SLIDE)

Well, not really, but these three guys who I met at Eastern Mennonite University loved bikes, and had been seriously riding bikes for much longer than I had even considered that a bicycle was more than just a kids toy. From left to right, Matt Styer, who lived next door to East Coast Bicycle Academy in Harrisonburg, had a deep obsession with steel Bianchi and Bridgestone bikes, and helped me pick out my first real road bike. Next to him is Julian Wiebe Johnson who grew up overseas and seemed to ride bikes harder than anyone else, constantly in search of the next curb to bunny hop or open street where he could ride without his hands on the handlebars. And finally, State College's own, and child of Gloria and Jim, my friend Kurt Rosenberger. More about Kurt in just a moment. If any are to blame for my love of bikes, it's these three. They understood that a bicycle was beautiful, practical, and experiential.

Their bicycle love was contagious. (SLIDE) I wasn't there to witness Kurt jumping over the campfire in this photo, or Matt heroically riding with four gallons of fresh apple cider in his bike basket, but those are the kinds of things that continue to live on and inspire my own bike adventures today. I can count at least ten of us who are still riding more than twenty years later because of their influence on classmates at EMU. I have no doubt that there are dozens of other folks who a few decades later are still actively riding bikes because of the bicycle influence of these guys.

They knew that it was far more meaningful to create opportunities to ride bikes with other people, rather than just suggesting that people might want to join them sometime. I had never given much thought about Carl's distinction between following and walking alongside, but I think these guys were the perfect example of that. They didn't just hop on their bikes hoping that someone might notice and follow along, they invited people to join them, and rode alongside - regardless of how new the person was to riding a bike.

Our passage from this morning tracks with this same theme. Jesus senses that his time on earth is coming to an end. He does not stand up from the supper table and say, "hey guys, follow me!" Instead he stoops to wash their feet. (SLIDE) The invitation is participatory. It is living life alongside, and it is lived out

as a concrete example. Jesus doesn't instruct them to wash each other's feet, he bends and shows them what this looks like to walk with each other in that moment.

I think our tendency as people who claim we follow the way of Jesus is to focus in on the individual Jesus as an example of servant leadership. "Look," we might say, "Jesus led by example." While this is true, to read this story and to suggest that overlooks that there is a broader and deeper community invitation here to participate alongside. It isn't just servant leadership, it's shoulder to shoulder allyship. I don't think Jesus was looking for ways to maintain the key position of leadership, he simply wanted to demonstrate what it looked like when we live out God's kin-dom here on earth together.

There's this other part of the passage that we should not overlook. It's the part where the writer of John's Gospel gives us some subtext that Jesus is aware of far more than what is on the surface. The line is this - *And you are clean, though not all of you.* For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." The easy interpretation is to do what modern Christians tend to do and suggest a cliché like, "Jesus knows our deepest selves, our innermost being," and perhaps that is true. But as I wondered about how this provides us with an example in our daily lives, I thought again about Carl's suggestion to walk with, rather than follow.

When we take the time to walk with someone, we start to notice the details. What sorts of things do they spend their time talking about? What are the stresses in their daily lives? Do they seem fatigued or energized? What does their body language convey? We don't perceive those details when we follow from a distance. It requires proximity to really know where a person is coming from, to know how to support each other or care for each other.

It's also a huge source of conflict when from a distance we assume. I think about so many societal issues - from civil rights to gender diversity, and often the pivot point toward a more inclusive community comes when people stop thinking of themselves as having power over, but shifting to walk alongside. I know many of us are feeling the weight of this weekend's military strikes - so many of which seem to represent that global nations seem to struggle with this idea of walking alongside.

As I was reflecting on Carl's words about following verses walking, I remembered one of my very first 20 mile bike rides with friends, in and around Harrisonburg, Virginia. Something like these photos from another ride with friends. (SLIDE) I didn't have much cardio ability, and was a bit out of shape. I was riding my new road bike and at first I couldn't believe how strong and fast I felt. But the longer we rode, the more the newness and physical fatigue began to set in. I looked around at those who had been riding for years, and was surprised that they were barely breathing hard. My legs were starting to wobble, and my butt was really not feeling great on the small road bike seat. Quickly my joy turned to concern. Was I going to be able to even finish this ride?

If you've ever been in the Shenandoah Valley, you know there are very few flat roads. Everything was rolling hills on that ride, and the longer we rode, each little incline felt like a mountain. The final stretch before getting back to home was up Mount Clinton Pike behind campus - a long incline that isn't incredibly steep, but at more than a mile of constant uphill, it seemed incredibly daunting for a newer rider. Between gulps of breath, I muttered something about just going on ahead of me. I assured my friends that I would catch up. If worse comes to worse, I'll get off my bike and walk the rest of the way. The response I got is that we're only as fast as our slowest rider. We'll wait for you at the top.

As any cyclist knows, there is nothing quite as demoralizing as realizing you don't have much left in your legs, while simultaneously watching your fellow riders zip away up a long climb. It felt like I was pedaling backwards.

But just as I was getting ready to put my feet down and dismount, I saw a rider heading back down the hill in my direction. (SLIDE) It was Kurt, on his way back to give me a pep talk, and to make sure I hadn't thrown in the towel. Through my grumbling Kurt reminded me that it takes time to build your cycling ability. He noted that this was already farther than I had ever ridden a bike. And when I threatened to put my feet down and walk, he told me to keep my feet on my pedals and did something that in the moment seemed superhuman. Without getting off his bike, he put his hand on my back and began pushing me up the hill.

As I shared these memories out loud this week, Meredith said in her matter-of-fact way, “isn’t that what true discipleship means? It’s not about preaching to someone or converting them, and then letting them find their way on their own, but inviting them to join you on the journey, and to walk with them as they learn what it means to be a Christian.”

Of course she was exactly right. Intuitively I felt the deep support of that cycling community at that moment. And I got a big cheer when we made it to the crest of that final hill. And guess what, even though I faded at the end of the ride, they invited me to join them on the next one. Had Kurt not returned, had the rest not been waiting for me at the top, would I still be riding bikes today? Would I have walked it home and immediately posted my new bike on Craigslist? I know now that I needed that community for support, and similar to my walk of faith, wherever we’ve moved, I’ve been sure to seek out community connections so that I don’t have to ride or walk alone.

The image of Kurt’s hand on my back, pushing me up that daunting hill, is a powerful reminder of what Jesus models for us here in John 13 and throughout our Gospel accounts. (SLIDE) Jesus doesn't stand at the top of the mountain beckoning us to follow; he gets down on the ground, shoulder-to-shoulder, and demonstrates a life of humble, radical, participatory love. Discipleship is not a distant aspiration; it is the intimate act of walking alongside, of washing feet, of sharing the burden, and of seeing and knowing each other, even when we are not all clean. As we leave this space and re-enter our daily lives, let us seek not to be leaders to be followed, but allies who walk *with* others, living out the experience found not just in knowing these things, but in *doing* them.

Today, we have two ways to step into this participatory example set by Christ. The first is through the sharing of our communion table, where we gather, not as followers looking up, but as equals sharing the broken bread and the cup—a feast of kinship and inclusion. The second is through the practice of footwashing, an invitation to humble ourselves and physically enact this shoulder-to-shoulder allyship with one another. Whether you choose to receive the bread and cup, or to wash a neighbor’s feet, or to have your own feet washed, know that you are invited to participate in the very same act of love and service that Jesus

demonstrated to his disciples. If footwashing makes you a bit uncomfortable, I invite you to consider other ways you can live out walking alongside Jesus in your daily life this week.

First, let's join together in a confession, found here on the screen. We will read together...

*Jesus, you don't always act  
the way we expect,  
the way that seems right and proper  
and reasonable and wise.*

*We feel for Peter.*

*In our confusion,  
(and perhaps feeling slightly offended),  
we too may say,  
"I'm sorry, God. What?!"*

*We may say,*

*"No way. Never!"*

*But you are persistent.*

*You remind us that  
we don't have to understand everything  
right now.*

*You invite us to simply take off our sandals  
and experience your love.*

*Scandalous as it is.*

As usual, servers will be here at the front with the communion elements. Footwashing stations are out in the foyer - please feel free to find your way back there if you wish - perhaps tapping someone on the shoulder to join you, or waiting for someone to find their way to you. We will keep these stations there for the rest of our service, as the Spirit leads you to participate.

And so on the night he was betrayed, Jesus invited his friends to join him at the table. Breaking bread, pouring wine. We model that today with this beautiful loaf, grape juice, and some gluten free crackers.

Come, and know the love that walks alongside you.

On the night he was betrayed...