

AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, LOVE ONE ANOTHER

(LESSON #23 (LUKE 22:1-38; JOHN 13-15))

INTRODUCTION: Nephi wrote of the Lord in his remarkable psalm of praise and awe, “He hath filled me with his love even unto the consuming of my flesh.” (2 Nephi 4:21) Nephi had just written “O wretched man that I am” and “My heart sorroweth because of my flesh” (2 Nephi 4:17) and “my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities, and “I am encompassed about because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me” (2 Nephi 4:18). But even so he was secure in the witness he had of the Lord’s improbable and immeasurable love. Paul wrote:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend . . . the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, the ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

The chapters we study in this lesson ought to bring us to a new comprehension of the breadth and length and depth and height of this love that “passeth knowledge.”

I. JESUS INSTITUTES THE SACRAMENT (Luke 22:7-30)

It was the “day of unleavened bread, when the Passover [lamb] must be killed.” (Luke 22:7) It was therefore the 14th of Nissan on the Jewish calendar. It was Thursday, the day of the suffering in Gethsemene and the day before the crucifixion.

The disciples had gathered after sunset in an upper room to partake of the Passover with their master. Since the sun had gone down, it was technically the 15th of Nissan, because the Jewish day ends and begins at sunset. Thus, in a remarkable outpouring of unknowing imagery, the

thousands and thousands of Passover lambs were killed on the same day that the Savior was hung on the cross.

After this Passover meal, which we have come to call the Last Supper, the Savior instituted the Sacrament as the ordinance designated to replace the Passover. If the paschal lamb was an image designed to direct the hearts of the people forward to the ministry and atonement of Christ, then the Sacrament was an ordinance designed to aid us in remembering the ministry and atonement of Christ. But it had significance well beyond the simple recollection of divine deeds from the meridian of time. Pres. J. Reuben Clark, Jr. wrote:

It is an interesting reflection that up to the time of Christ, apparently . . . Israel . . . worshiped with the ritual which . . . looked forward to the sacrifice of the Son by substituting animal sacrifices as under the Mosaic Law . . .

The sacrifice was always vicarious. Animals were . . . sacrificed for the sins of the individual and for the sins of the people . . . but it was always a vicarious sacrifice, apparent with little actual sacrifice, except for the value of the animal sacrificed, by the individuals themselves, to cancel the debt, so to speak, against their lives and living in the eyes of the Almighty One. The sinner seemingly, in general, took on no obligation to abandon his sins, but took on only the obligation to offer sacrifice therefor.

But under the new covenant that came in with Christ, the sinner must offer the sacrifice out of his own life, not by offering the blood of some other creature; he must give up his sins, he must repent, he himself must make the sacrifice, and that sacrifice was calculated to reach out into the life of the sinner in the future so that he would become a better and changed man. (Behold the Lamb of God, pp. 107-108)

In other words (my own less powerful ones), it was as though when a man committed a sin, if he felt guilt and remorse, he could kill a dove

to prove his contrition. A really bad sin might require a lamb or a kid, perhaps even a bullock. But the sacrament changed all that. No more animals on the altar now. The ordinance requires that we place our anger, our unclean thoughts, our lack of discipline—our sins—on the altar. This must be the reason for Paul’s instructions, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, Edith and drinketh damnation unto himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:28,28) We ought to examine ourselves before we partake to see if there are sacrifices of sin we need to make before we can partake worthily. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., said,

The Lord has said that we should not permit anyone to partake of the sacrament unworthily. This means, as I understand it, anyone in the church who has been in transgression of some kind and has not repented. (*Doctrines of Salvation, 2:250*)

On another occasion he wrote:

If any of the members are not in good standing; if they have in their hearts any feeling of hatred, envy, or sin of any kind, they should not partake of these emblems. If there are any differences or feelings existing between brethren, these differences should be adjusted before the guilty parties partake; otherwise they will eat and drink unworthily and bring on them the condemnation spoken of by Paul. We should see that our hearts and hands are clean and pure. (*Doctrines of Salvation, 2:343*)

It is interesting to me that on four occasions the Lord spoke of *offering up a sacrament*, rather than partaking of the sacrament. Those references are in D&C 59:9; 59:12; 62:4; and 89:5. What does it mean to offer a sacrament? What are we to offer? I suspect that the answer is in the quotes above.

There is also a level of worthiness required of those who prepare, bless, and pass the sacrament. Those of you who teach these lessons to youth

might use the story below from Lowell L. Bennion. He share this experience in the *New Era*, November 1972, page 16:

I had an experience in the mission field that is very memorable to me. A man came to me after Church - he was twice my age, a very unhappy person - and told me that he had committed a grave sin before he joined the church, that his wife would not forgive him, would not divorce him, and constantly reminded him of his good-for-nothingness. He said, "I've come to think of myself at her estimate. How can I be whole again and pure of heart, clean in my thoughts?" I said, "What have you tried to do for this problem?" He said, "I've fought it, I've fought it." I'd had a class in psychology before I went on a mission, and I told him there must be a better way than to fight sin. We knelt in prayer together, and afterwards I gave him a book to read - *As a Man Thinketh in His Heart, So Is He* - and then I put my arm around him (he was shorter than I), gave him a firm handclasp, and told him that he could overcome his problem. And then by inspiration or coincidence, I said to him, "How would you like to prepare the Lord's supper for Sunday School?" (He was a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood.) He said, "Do you think I'm worthy to do this?" I said, "No, I don't think any of us really are. But I think Jesus would be pleased if you would render Him this service." And so he proceeded to set the Lord's table each Sunday morning. After about six weeks I met him coming up the aisle before Sunday School. I put out my hand to reassure him. He put his hand behind his back and said nothing. I said, "Have I offended you?" He said, "Oh, no. I've just washed my hands with soap and hot water, and I can't shake hands with you or any man until I've set the Lord's table." (Lowell L. Bennion, *The New Era*, Nov. 1972 p.16)

II. AFTER WASHING THEIR FEET, JESUS COMMANDS THE APOSTLES TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER (John 13)

When the supper had ended, Christ proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples. He knew that the “Father had given all things into his hands,” and he knew who he was and where he was going. (13:3) And to a great extent, his disciples knew these things as well. I wonder how they reacted when he knelt before them and began to wash their feet. We have a record of the reaction of Peter, who was not the first to receive this ministration, but no insight into the feelings of the others as this incomparable Man who had raised the dead and healed the sick and confounded the Jewish Leaders and declared himself the Redeemer of all mankind knelt before them with towel and water, and began lovingly to cleanse the filth from their feet. We must not miss this outpouring of service as a powerful testimony of his love for these men.

I think all of us can identify with Peter’s exclamation, “Lord, dost thou wash my feet? . . . thou shalt never wash my feet.” (13:6,8)

Something often unnoticed is happening here, by the way. The Savior washed Judas’ feet along with the others. Consider the implications. Jesus was aware that within a few hours he would brutally, violently dead. He knew which of his closest friends would betray him, and yet he washed his feet, too. This is such a remarkable display of discipline and self-control that it defies any explanation, except the one the Savior gave when he explained what he had done.

Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (John 13: 13-17)

When I discovered in advance one day that my son planned to take the car without permission for an evening of entertainment, I turned 8 shades of purple and threatened to ground him till his mission. But

when Jesus knew in advance that Judas would betray him to his enemies, he washed his feet. Where in all of scripture is a better example of the practice of the following injunction?

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)

President Charles W. Penrose spoke of our duty in this matter. He said,

Now, we have no personal warfare against even our enemies. Those who slander and abuse, who try to irritate us to make us respond and retaliate, let them do that and fail. Let them go on with their evil works. Daniel saw in the vision of the last times, that "the wicked should do wickedly, and none of the wicked should understand;" (Daniel 12:10) but the wise shall understand, he says, "and they that turn many unto righteousness shall shine like the stars and like the sun forever and ever." (Daniel 12:3) Let them go on, therefore, with their evil work. But let us do our work of light and truth and righteousness. (Charles W. Penrose, Conference Report, October 1906, p.56)

We must be willing to serve others, to love others, and to avoid the pettiness that so often comes with an awareness of our own goodness when compared with the failings of others, or in an awareness of our own importance when compared with the insignificance of others. In all of our relationships with others, we must "shine like the stars and like the sun." We must impart light. "Behold," Christ said, "I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do." (3 Nephi 18:24) In John 13, what do we "see" him do? We see him wash the feet of his friends and his enemy.

One other point worth noting is the response of the Twelve to the announcement that a betrayer was among them. John tells us that following this announcement, "the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake." But Matthew mentions something else.

And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?" (Matthew 26:22)

This is a lesson worth learning. As we sit before the prophets in General Conference, or before our stake and ward leaders, or even as we listen to the counsel of our parents and friends, we would do well to ask ourselves this question: "Lord, is it I?"

When President Hinckley counsels us to reach out to the new members, and to love and fellowship them, we must not say, "I certainly hope my brother in Baltimore is listening to this." When Elder Joe Christensen warns about the dangers of greed, selfishness, and overindulgence (Ensign, May 1999, 9-11), we must not think, "S. Wayne Flammer sure needs to hear this." When Elder Holland speaks of the great things that will be required of fathers in this kingdom, (see Ensign, May 1999, 14-16) we must not mourn over the fact that our own fathers did not hear the message. When Elder Maxwell admonishes us to repent of our selfishness (see Ensign, May 1999, 23-25), we must not rejoice that someone is finally sending a message to rich Uncle Throckmorton P. Rufflebottom. What we must do is ask the *Last Supper Question*: "Lord is it I?"

III. JESUS TEACHES "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE" AND "I AM THE TRUE VINE" (John 14:1-15; 15)

Christ knew what was about to happen, and he knew that the Apostles, even after all of the instruction, did not clearly understand. "Let not your heart be troubled," he said. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." (John 13:1) He has never let them down before, and he will not abandon them now. "I go to prepare a place for you. . . I will come again and receive you unto myself." (John 13:2,3) I rejoice in the power and clarity of the Savior's answer to Thomas concern, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" Christ replied, "I am the way . . ."

What a message for a world enveloped in darkness and misdirection. With innumerable millions who do not know the route or the

destination wandering to and fro in darkness, the Savior promises, “I am the way! Come, follow me.”

The way in which we follow is described in John 14:15,21,23,24,31, and John 15:10,14,17—“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

In John 14:27, the Savior repeats counsel he gave in 14:1: Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” *How can we help it, Lord?* they might have asked him. *With you gone, trouble and fear will encompass us constantly.* His solution was, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you . . .”

On . . . the night of the greatest suffering the world has ever known or will ever know, he said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

I submit to you that may be one of the Savior’s commandments that is, even in the hearts of otherwise faithful Latter-day Saints, almost universally disobeyed; and yet I wonder whether our resistance to this invitation could be any more grievous to the Lord’s merciful heart. I can tell you this as a parent. As concerned as I would be if somewhere in their lives one of my children were seriously troubled or unhappy or disobedient, nevertheless, I would be infinitely more devastated if I felt that at such a time that child could not trust me to help, or should feel his or her interest were unimportant to me or unsafe in my care. In that same spirit, I am convinced that none of us can appreciate how deeply it wounds the loving heart of the Savior when he finds that his people do not feel confident in his care or secure in his hands or trust in his commandments. (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: CES Satellite Broadcast, 2 March 1997)

On a recent trip to Hawaii, my wife and I followed an abandoned road through a deep wood to a lovely, secluded bay where we spent a

beautiful hour snorkeling. As we made our way back to the highway where we had left our car, we stopped to examine the trees through which we were passing. Some of them were huge, monsters arching into the sky on colossal trunks from which suspended towering branches. The tropical sun filtered through a canopy of green so green reality was transformed. And hanging from these colossal branches were vines, great vines 30, 40, even 50 feet in length. In a mood to play Tarzan, I grabbed one and swung back and forth while my wife snapped a photo. I weigh 200 and none of your business, but these vines were capable of supporting a Volvo. My corpulent frame never strained a single wooden fiber.

“I am the true vine,” the Savior declared (John 15:1), and he is. We are branches who derive our nourishment and our support from his strength and goodness. And we can depend on him. Isaiah spoke of this quality of the Redeemer when he wrote

And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue [there is room enough for all of us to attach ourselves to this vine], all vessels of small quantity, even from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons [and room enough for burdens of any size—small or large]. (Isaiah 22:24)

CONCLUSION:

“Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God” the Lord said to Oliver Cowdery, “and I will encircle you in the arms of my love.” (D&C 6:20) Who can comprehend the significance of that embrace? We have had sobering glimpses from these chapters of this love: the sacrament, the washing of feet, the way; the vine . . . and in the midst of all of this, one final directive:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
(John 13:34)

and

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I

have loved you. (John 15:12)

What a challenge and a blessing to be able to generate and then demonstrate charity for those around us—charity, the pure love of Christ. (See Moroni 7:47)

Copyright © 2003 by Ted Gibbons <tedgibbons@yahoo.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.