

Year 1: Session 6 – Lent (according to the Gospel of John)

Class 17: John 13:1-17 – *Jesus washes the disciples' feet*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Highlight how Jesus understands leadership
- Define “blessed”
- Discuss how “serving” doesn’t just mean doing what the other person want

Materials needed

- Video clip from “Coach Carter” (can be seen on rfour.org)
- Electronics that show the video clip

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* Pretend that the world is going to end in, say, 4 hours. Meaning, you and everything you know is going to be gone in 4 hours. But until those 4 hours are up, everything stays / works the same. You’re the only one who knows it. What are you going to do during those 4 hours?

INTRO / Transition to VIDEO

- In today’s scripture story, Jesus knows he has less than 8 hours or so of “regular life” left.
- So what does he do with that time?
- We’ll see that one of the things Jesus does in today’s story is demonstrate and talk to his disciples about leadership.
- To help us get prepared for some leadership training from Jesus, let’s first do the following activity.
- We’re going to try the activity of “Simon Says,” but with a twist.
- *Both* teachers are going to be Simon.
- Teacher #1 will be the traditional Simon and Teacher #2 will be the more modern teacher. This means...
 - When Teacher #1 starts a command with “Simon says,” then you are to do that command. If Teacher 1 does not start a command with “Simon says” then you do not do that command. That’s the traditional way, right?

- However, when Teacher #2 starts a command with “Simon says,” then you are to NOT do that command. But, when Teacher #2 does *not* start a command with “Simon says,” that is when you will follow the command.
- If you mess up, you’re out of the game (note to teachers: It’s up to you how strictly you will enforce this).

DO ACTIVITY

Note to teachers, it is probably best to choreograph and then practice the commands so that you can do them pretty rapidly back-and-forth. Something like the following (but feel free to add your own brand of humor and trickery to it):

Teacher 1: Stand up (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 2: Simon says sit down (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 1: Simon says stand up (*students stand*)

Teacher 2: Simon says sit down (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 1: Simon says jump up and down (*jump up and down*)

Teacher 2: (timed with the jumping) FALL TO THE GROUND (*fall to the ground*)

Teacher 1: GET BACK UP (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 2: CHANGE SEATS (*change seats*)

Teacher 1: ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 2: Simon says Wave your hands (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 1: Like you just don’t care (*nothing should happen*)

Teacher 2: Now raise the roof (*upward motion with hands as if pushing against the ceiling*)

Teacher 1: Simon says Stop that! (*stop raising the roof*)

Teacher 2: Ok, everyone return to your regular seats (*return to seats*)

Teacher 1: Simon says activity is over and well done. (*activity is all done*)

ASK

- Was that confusing to you? If so, why?
- *To be asked if not addressed during first question:* Was it at all confusing that the rules for obeying the two Simons were just the opposite of each other?
- Was there one Simon that was easier for you to remember how to listen to? If so, which one and why?
- Even if you didn’t get tricked, would you agree that the activity would have been easier if there had just been one Simon?

TELL

- So in today’s story, Jesus takes the usual understanding of what it means to be a leader and turns it upside down. In some ways, he says just the opposite of what most people say when they talk about leadership.
- As we read the story, think about and listen for how the disciples respond to what Jesus is saying.
- Also, as mentioned earlier, remember that this story takes place only a few hours before Jesus is arrested (which then leads to his crucifixion).

READ John 13:1-17 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers*)

1 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. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 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. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

ASK

- Verse 1 – when did this story take place? (Before the festival of Passover; more specifically, the night before Passover; the night before Jesus is crucified)
 - “Fun” fact: In John, Jesus is crucified ON Passover day – in the other Gospels, the Last Supper takes place on Passover and Jesus is crucified the day after Passover.
- Verse 1 still – for how long does Jesus love his own (his own = his disciples). (Answer: to the end)
- Verse 2 – Who is going to betray Jesus? (Judas)
- What is Jesus doing here in verse 5? (Washing the feet of the disciples)
- Remember, the people in Jesus’ time mostly walked – they either had sandals or went barefoot – they did not have socks or close-toed shoes. With that in mind, how dirty do you think the disciples’ feet were? (very! Not only with dirt, but also with things like horse and donkey “exhaust” -- to put it mildly.)
 - Note: Typically this was such an awful experience that in households with slaves, the lowliest slave was the one tasked with the job. In other words, no one wanted to do it.
 - Important note: Jesus washes the feet of Judas as well – who Jesus is aware is going to betray him.
- So, in our opening question, did anyone say that in their last 4 hours of life, they’d do chores that no one else ever wanted to do? (*this is mostly meant as a rhetorical question*)
- Verse 6 and 8: Is Peter ok to have Jesus wash his feet? (No – he isn’t)
- Verse 8 and 9: What changes Peter’s mind? (Jesus says Peter’s refusal will null/break their relationship)
- Verse 13 – what do the disciples call Jesus? (Lord and Teacher)
- And what do those names suggest about how the disciples think of Jesus? (that he is worthy of respect, that he is higher ranking than them, that he is their leader)
- Verse 15 – What example does Jesus say he has set for them? (that as their leader, he has served them, done servant work for them, and that they should do the same for each other)
- Verse 16 – So, if servants are not greater than their master, and their master is serving them, then what should they as servants be doing? (serving others just as much as their master is serving them)
- Verse 17 – What will the disciples “be” if they do what their master does? (they will be blessed)

- What do you think that means, to be “blessed?”

TELL

- So “being blessed” might sound nice, but it doesn’t necessarily sound like a great reward, does it? I mean wouldn’t it be more rewarding, for instance, to receive a million dollars than being “blessed?”
- But Jesus isn’t really talking about rewards, here, when he says “blessed.” We know this because the Hebrew word for “blessed” (which is *barak*) means “to kneel” or “bend at the knee” (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/1288.htm>)
 - (Note: Though the New Testament is written in Greek, Jesus would not have been speaking Greek. He would’ve been speaking Aramaic and *barak* is the word that would’ve been translated to Greek that we then translate as “blessed”).
- In other words, Jesus is telling his disciples, “This is how you are to be a leader – as someone who consistently bends at the knee, as someone who consistently serves the people they are meant to be leading.”
- If we think about our opening activity of Simon Says and some of our answers to the opening question, we see that Jesus’ way of understanding leadership is completely opposite of how we usually think about leadership.
- Usually we think of leadership as getting people to do what we want them to do
- But Jesus is teaching his disciples that leadership is about serving others.
- However, that serving is meant to be directed by God’s wisdom and love -- NOT based on what the other person wants/is asking for.

TRANSITION TO MOVIE CLIP

- To help us think about what serving others in love rather than just giving someone what they might want -- let’s watch the following clip from the movie “Coach Carter.”
- The scene is pretty self-explanatory, but to help us get up to speed, here’s what’s happened up to this point: A basketball coach has canceled a very good basketball season because his basketball players have not followed through with their agreement to get good grades in their classes.
- The scene we’re going to watch is a school board meeting dealing with the basketball coach’s decisions.

MOVIE CLIP

ASK/TELL

- So, do you think the coach cares about his players (yes)
- But does the community want what the coach is offering (no)
- Does the community’s rejection of what the coach is offering also reject the coach, then? (yes)
- Going back to the scripture story, this is somewhat similar to how Peter didn’t want Jesus to wash his feet.
- Peter thought Jesus should function a certain way. In effect, Peter started to take charge.
- But Jesus points out to Peter that they can’t BOTH be in charge. It just can’t work that way – just like the two Simons in our opening activity didn’t work out very well.
- Either Peter is in charge or Jesus is in charge. And if Peter is in charge, then that’s ok – but it will push Jesus away from Peter. This is what Jesus means when he says, ““Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”
- That breaking of relationship is what we see happen in the movie clip – having too many people be in charge effectively canceled the coach’s leadership and pushed him out of his job.
- However, Peter makes a better decision than the parents did in the movie clip. As a disciple, Peter *doesn’t* want to break his relationship with Jesus. This is why we see Peter change his mind so quickly.

- Later on in the movie, there are a number of moving scenes where the kids/players chose just like Peter chose: To NOT break their relationship with their coach. They agreed to his terms and worked as a team to get better grades in their classes.
- So after the opening activity, I asked you if you thought the activity would be easier if there was just one Simon instead of two. You all agreed that yes, the activity would be easier if there was only one Simon.
- Well guess what? Jesus agrees – it's easier and better if there's only one Simon calling the shots.
- What we see from Jesus (and from the basketball coach in the movie clip) is that the best kind of leadership is leadership that is not forced upon us, but is leadership that we choose.
- Furthermore, what we hear from Jesus at the end of the scripture story is that if we choose to follow Jesus' leading, then we will learn from Jesus how to be leaders to others.
- We will learn to do like Jesus did -- to offer God's love and teaching to those who accept it and never force it upon those who do not accept it.

CLOSING PRAYER