

Emulate Christ

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Introduction

This is the final week of our post-Easter series Reckless Love. Over the past five weeks, we have explored what it means to begin with love, expand the circle, love lavishly and openheartedly, and value the vulnerable. Along the way, our understanding of what love requires has widened. This week, we consider these core questions that undergird the entire series: whose examples are we following, and what does it look like to follow them with our whole lives?

In John 13, Jesus kneels before his disciples and washes their feet before then telling them to do the same for each other. In Matthew 25, he identifies himself with the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned, and declares that how we treat them is how we treat him. Bishop Tom Berlin's Reckless Love closes with a call to align our hands and our hearts, and to let the love we have received from God become the love we practice in the world. This week, we explore what it means to emulate Christ.

Illustration Video

Content note: This clip contains realistic depictions of battlefield violence, wartime injuries, firearms, and hand-to-hand combat. Viewer discretion is advised.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK0fMJrQBcs>

In this fan-made compilation from *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), Army medic Desmond Doss refuses to carry a weapon, and in doing so sets the stage for incredible transformation.

Why This Video?

Desmond Doss enlists as an Army medic because he wants to save lives, and the Army puts him on trial for refusing to pick up a rifle. His commanding officers call him a coward. His fellow soldiers beat him up. Nearly everyone around him insists he must wield a weapon or go home. Instead of giving in, he stays... and he stays unarmed. On a ridge at Okinawa, after his entire company retreats, Doss remains in the smoke and works to rescue wounded soldiers, lowering them to safety. One by one. His prayer is simple: "Lord, help me get one more." In light of his heroism, the men who once mocked him refuse to return to battle without him.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Doss tells a military tribunal: "With the world so set on tearing itself apart, it doesn't seem like such a bad thing to me to want to put a little bit of it back together." What do you hear in those words? When have you felt the pull to put something back together that everyone else seemed willing to let fall apart?
2. Doss's sergeant warns his fellow soldiers: "Do not look to him to save you on the battlefield." By the end, those same soldiers refuse to go back up the ridge without him. What changed? Was it Doss who changed? Was it the way they saw him? Was it the soldiers themselves?

3. When Doss talks about the moment he almost killed his father, he says, “In my heart, I did.” His promise to God grows from that memory. Think about a moment in your own life when something painful became the foundation for a commitment you still keep. What happened?
4. On the ridge, Doss’s prayer is simple: “Lord, help me get one more.” He repeats it while dragging wounded soldiers through smoke and lowering them down a cliff face on a rope. What does it suggest to you that his words are that simple and that physical?
5. After the rescue, Doss’ captain says, “I’ve never been more wrong about someone in my life. I hope one day you can forgive me.” What do you think changed for Captain Glover? What does it take to say this to someone you publicly dismissed? Have you ever had your perspective changed about someone? What made it possible, or what held you back?
6. Captain Glover tells Doss, “Most of these men don’t believe the same way you do, but they believe so much in what you did.” What is the difference between believing the same way someone else does and believing in what they do? Have you seen that distinction play out in your own life?
7. One of the real soldiers Doss saved says that discovering “he was one of the bravest persons alive, and then to have him end up saving my life was the irony of all things.” Where have you experienced that kind of reversal, where the person you least expected became the one who had the greatest impact for you?

John 13:1–17, 34–35 (NRSVue)

¹Now 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. ²The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then 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. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” ⁷Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” ⁸Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰Jesus 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.” ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

¹²After 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? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Matthew 25:34–40 (NRSVue)

³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

Scripture Study Questions

1. John describes Jesus’ actions in almost choreographic detail: he gets up, takes off his robe, ties a towel around himself, pours water, begins to wash feet (verses 4–5). Why do you think the Gospel writer slows down and walks us through each step? What does this deliberate pacing tell you about what is happening in the room?
2. Peter’s reaction is immediate: “You will never wash my feet.” When someone tries to serve you in a way that feels uncomfortably personal, what is your instinct? Have you ever pushed back against an act of love? What was behind the resistance?
3. Jesus says, “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (verse 15). Berlin observes that the “power of the servant-oriented act” of foot-washing doesn’t always translate easily to our culture. What physical acts of service in your own life come closest to what Jesus is doing here, acts that put you in an uncomfortably low position for someone else’s sake?
4. Jesus tells his disciples their whole testimony depends on whether they love one another as he loved them (verses 34–35). Bishop Berlin calls this the standard by which the world will judge the church. Using that measure, how would you assess our congregation’s testimony? What could make our testimony more compelling?
5. In Matthew, the righteous in Jesus’ parable have no memory of serving the king. They fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, and visited the prisoner without recognizing who they were serving. Do you think being aware that you are “serving Christ” in another person changes the act? Does it make the love more pure? Less pure? Something else?
6. Bishop Berlin draws on John Wesley’s claim that we serve the invisible God by serving the neighbors “standing visibly before us.” The king identifies himself with “the least of these.” What does that self-identification tell you about where God chooses to be found? How does that challenge the way we decide who is worth our attention?
7. Jesus says the king will judge the nations, not just individuals. How does a community or congregation show love in the ways this parable identifies: feeding, welcoming, clothing, visiting? What is one concrete thing our faith community could do this month to more closely emulate what Jesus describes here?

Weekly Action

Last week's message was titled Value the Vulnerable. Write the letters **V** and **E** on post-it notes and add them next to your **B**, **E**, **L**, and **O**. Your post-its now spell **BE LOVE**, the invitation that has been guiding us through this entire series.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet and told them to do the same for one another. Desmond Doss prayed, "Lord, help me get one more," and then took action to live out that prayer. This week, identify one person in your life who could use a concrete act of service—something tangible, something specific. It's ok if it's even a little uncomfortable. This could be a meal for a neighbor going through a hard time, a visit to someone who has been isolated, or an hour of your time given to a cause you've been meaning to support. Before you act, pray. Ask God to show you who and how. Then... do it! Afterward, write down what happened and share it with someone you trust. Ask each other: what did this teach us about what it means to BE LOVE?

Prayer

God of towels and basins, you knelt before your own disciples and washed their feet. You showed us that love is a practice to be lived, day after day, with our hands and our hearts aligned. We confess that we have loved cautiously, measured our service by what was convenient, and walked past the people you asked us to see. Teach us to kneel. Teach us to stay with those who feel abandoned. Teach us to look for your face in the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned. Transform us, by your Spirit, into people whose lives leave a wake of love behind them, and whose testimony to your grace is written in what we do, not just in what we say. May we live in the world as your beloved ones, set free to emulate the love of Christ in every encounter. Amen.