

I. Advanced organizer -

- A. **Meme** -“blessed are the poor”; “blessed are all lives” to Jesus. Response of some responding “all lives matter” to the social media cry that “black lives matter”. **What would Jesus’ response be?**
- B. Jesus didn’t tweet about it. Social media of his day was genuinely social: public speaking at a rally. Think about how that’s different than our social media today. You had to show up somewhere surrounded by people - villagers from your neighborhood and folks who’ve traveled far. Religious leaders, merchants, working poor. Rubbing shoulders, unified around this one person. When he says things - you see their responses.
- C. **Jesus preached. Sermon on the mount - beatitudes.**
 - 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - 2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 - 3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
 - 4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...
 - 5. Blessed are those who are persecuted...
- D. We’re **finishing series on how we activate love with “Live the Love”**. We started this series in the wake of the deadly attack on Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. We started asking the question of: how do we move beyond memes and hashtags of “love wins” to actual **lived experiences of love?** June has changed to July, our conversation has moved from Gay rights and LGBTQ discrimination to more deaths of black men at the hands of law enforcement and the much bigger questions of systemic racism they prompt, as well as questions of response. Tragic response in Dallas at a protest - ended in the loss of 5 officers. So as we think about these concerns, in what direction does Jesus point us? **The meme’s point in some sense is, I think, if Jesus could tweet, he’d tweet “black lives matter” today. But where would he go beyond that?**

II. **To get a sense of this question, we’re gonna look to day at John 13**

- A. Beginning of a long section of John - 4 chapters directed exclusively to his closest followers at the end of his life; right before he’s turned over to Jewish leaders and Romans, and eventually executed. For John, time slows down here. We’ve only had 12 chapters so far to cover Jesus’ life and ministry, and now we spend the next 4 chapters on a few hours. There’s important teaching on love here; you could say this is Jesus’ great treatise on it.
- B. **Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. 4 So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, 5 and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”7 Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.”**

8 “No,” Peter protested, “you will never ever wash my feet!”

Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.”

9 Simon Peter exclaimed, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!”

10 Jesus replied, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.” 11 For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? 13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. 14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16 I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. 17 Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

C. Starts with intro setup. Jesus knows we’re getting to the end. He’s intentional. He knows Judas has already betrayed him. And then we have this:

1. Jesus knows Father has given him all authority...so he got up from the table and took off his clothes...
2. **Point One: Jesus is making a conscious choice to empty himself of power and privilege to demonstrate love.**
 - a) John seems to remind us of Jesus’ awareness of his authority and power; points to Jesus awareness of his power and connects that to his choice to lay it down.
3. **How does he lay down power?**
 - a) **He strips.** Jesus stands up from the dinner table where he is undoubtedly the guest of honor, the leader of this group, and he takes off his robe. He takes off his outer garments. He strips himself of his customary layers, until he is left with nothing but the attire of a slave.
 - b) Wealthy Jewish homes in that day had **gentile slaves**; they were the bottom of the social hierarchy. And they were the ones usually tasked with this duty Jesus is about to undertake.
 - c) **People wore sandals everywhere they went**; walking on dusty roads. So even though they’d bathed, their feet were filthy. They were clothed in just a tunic, and had a long cloth that tied around their waist and then was long enough to use to clean and dry the feet of those who were being served.
 - d) With this act, **Jesus moves himself from the place of most honor and power in this social structure to the place of the least.**
 - e) This is a conscious act that John clearly understands to be connected to something bigger than clothing. The word he uses here for took off his robe is different than is often used for removing clothing; it’s different than “stripped”. John is saying Jesus “laid down” his garments. He will use the same word a bit later to talk about laying down one’s very life. Clearly this is about more than just keeping his robe dry. Jesus is intentionally enacting love in a way that speaks beyond this simple act at this discreet moment.
 - f) Throughs Jesus’ ministry he has used stories to make points. Metaphor has been a key way he has explained abstract truths, by making them concrete.
 - (1) Story of father welcoming back his wayward son who returns home
 - (2) Story of shepherd going after lost sheep
 - (3) Now he’s taking it a step further. **He’s not just telling a story about someone laying down privilege, he’s doing it himself.** He’s *embodying* the story. **1st century performance art.** Prophetically illustrating the point he wants them to get

with his own body, but the teaching is not just about feet. He's communicating something they need to understand about where the next twenty-four hours are going to go, and ultimately, what they will mean. **This too is a parable.**

- g) Like they generally are with Jesus' parables, **disciples are confused**. They are clearly shaken up by Jesus' counter-cultural move. It makes them **really uncomfortable**. Peter's always the one who says what no-one else is willing to. And so he makes his confusion clear; "Are you gonna wash my feet?"
- (1) **"You" and "my" are both emphatic**. And he continues with statement in verse 8. Literal translation doesn't make sense in English, but it communicates force of Peter's response. "you will never wash my feet forever". This cannot happen. Not at all.
- (2) Peter is **trying to communicate love; respect for Jesus**. But his love is defective, because it **lacks humility**. Peter's concern is with social standing; with who belongs where. Core to this is **an identity rooted in pride and self-will**. Peter is offended by Jesus eschewing social standing through humility and service. He shows a kind of false humility by refusing Jesus' service. But it's clear this is really rooted in his own sense of identity, rather than openness to be vulnerable and receptive to Jesus, because when Jesus corrects him and says, "I have to do this", **his pride and ego assert themselves** again. "OK, well if that's what it means to be in you, then let me be the best of the best. Wash my hands and head as well."
- (3) But Jesus is saying **you cannot do this for yourself**. You cannot build yourself up here. This is not about asserting your will. This is not about being the most deserving, the most dedicated, the most anything. This is about accepting my love for you. This is about accepting my affection. **This is about having the humility to let me touch your dirty feet**. To let me get close to you and see the ugliness. To let me smell the rank. And to let me clean what's nasty and make it better.
- (a) some churches like to do literal foot washing ceremonies sometimes, but you know when people go to those, their feet are impeccably clean. Jesus isn't interested in the pretense of service. He's calling his followers to let him get in their muck and clean.
4. **Point two: Until we lay down the need to protect our place in the social structure, we cannot fully give or receive love.**
- a) As long as we are working to carefully cultivate our sense of self based on a social hierarchy we are separated from others in ways that inhibit our capacity to love and be loved. - When we define ourselves as other than something else: I'm more than a child. I'm more than a woman. I'm of a higher privileged race than xyz. I'm more educated. I'm more affluent. I belong with these people... These markers of identity become barriers that separate us from one another.
- b) **This need to exalt some and to other-ize others is a violent act psychologically**, which is the first step in the direction of being violent physically
- c) But here, Jesus is driving home the point he has been making throughout his life. **We are all human beings**. We are all one family. We are all children of the same Creator. And we're called to love, honor, and serve one another.
- d) Disciples needed to **lay down their pride**, lay down their social statuses, and **let Jesus get in the midst of the dirty toes**. And of course the cleansing of their feet represented a much **deeper cleansing** that they needed to submit themselves to. **Would they allow Jesus' blood to be spilled for them?** Would they allow his blood to be poured out as **an offering of love**, an offering meant to cleanse this very isolationist

pride and self-will that is at the heart of what we call sin? Would they allow their spirits, their souls, their very lives to be cleansed by Jesus' self-giving love? Would they allow him through confession and pleas for help to see the dirt not just between their toes but between the crevices of their hearts? **Or would they keep him at arms length and say "no, no". Don't get too close.** This isn't really for you to see.

- e) **Richard Rohr, the Franciscan father and Spiritual teacher, talks a lot about the path of spiritual growth being the path of descent.** The path of becoming less. The path of laying down opportunity and success and embracing vulnerability and weakness. The path of surrendering control. Lets just name that **this sucks**. Real challenge. Part of what makes **marriage** so hard is at times it **requires descent**.

(1) been married almost 15 years. There have been seasons where I had to descend. Little and big things. Jason and I both had offers for training and education that we wanted to do, but in different cities. I descended for three years so he could pursue his dream of engineering school. When we finally moved to Iowa for me to train, it was descent for him.

(2) **Parenthood has been descent for both of us.** I stopped gigging not long after Elliott was born; it was too hard on my family. Earlier this year I had to leave my choir, which I love, because it was too costly for Jason and the kids in this season of life, particularly with all Haven needs right now, too. Descent can suck, when we enter it, but it's also awesome. In the places of descent we experience the most intimacy and love. We bond with those we've descended to love. We receive from them we give to them, we become mutually interdependent rather than isolated by what we can do for ourselves. And we often find Jesus.

5. Point three: Jesus calls those who follow him to the same self-denial in love that he demonstrates.

- a) Jesus is not just doing this for them, He is saying **"this is your example**. You are to do likewise. If I can do this, you can do this. It's not just about letting me do it for everyone, you gotta do this too."

- b) Doesn't stop with simply washing feet. He means the **whole deal**.

(1) Two chapters later, in John 15, says this:

9 "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. 13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other."

(2) I took my girls recently to see a stage play of **Disney's the Little Mermaid**.

- (a) Surprising part seemed to really stick with Junia: **King Triton's** choice to give himself over to the sea witch in Ariel's place, so that she may be free. This clearly stuck with her and has prompted a question that she has now asked Jason and I multiple times in different ways. Comes in the form of a

hypothetical....**Ultimately: do you love me enough to die for me? Do you love me enough to make yourself completely vulnerable on my behalf?**

- (3) Most of us, if we're honest, could **maybe answer that question in the affirmative to our children**. Perhaps to our spouse. But would it go beyond that? Who are we willing to become vulnerable on behalf of? And if we follow Jesus, are we really willing to follow him there, to the place where he makes himself completely vulnerable; not just for the people he likes the most, the people's he's close to; not just his *best-ies*. Jesus washes the feet of the man he knows is responsible for the death he will soon suffer. Jesus washes the feet of Judas. He looks him in the eye, he knows full well what he will do, yet he gets on his knees and cleans him. And this cleansing of Judas symbolizes just as much with Judas as it does with Peter. Jesus is getting ready to go to the cross even for his betrayer, even for Judas.

(a) *This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.*

D. Brings me back to the conversation of the day. **What is Jesus' response to Black Lives Matter?**

1. What does it mean to serve our African-American brothers and sisters at this moment? How are we called to wash the feet of these members of our human family?
2. I've been wrestling a lot with this over the last couple of weeks. Wrestling with the questions of what it means for me, particularly as a **white person** who is, by the fact of my race, a beneficiary of a system of privilege that I have often taken for granted, but which has come at the cost of injustice to others.
 - a) Now I want to name that this is bigger than a **black-white problem**, because our country is more than a black-white country. I'm grateful that we have a church that reflects this, even in our humble beginnings here, and hopefully this will grow as our church grows, as well. Personally, I have not heard as much as I'd like in the public discourse about where **the voices of our non-black brothers and sisters of color fit**. There are questions raised that I don't have the answers to, and we need to work together as a community to discern, and I encourage us to listen to one another and our brothers and sisters of color as they share their perspectives, when considering these questions of race in America.
3. If we are to engage with the issues brought up by the Black Lives Matter movement, and we're to look to Jesus' actions in John 13 and his words in John 15 for direction, I think we need to start with **acknowledging the truth: some of us have more clothes on than others**. It's not that we deserve more clothes, it's not that we've earned them, but by nature of being born into a system which affords greater and lesser degrees of protection and support based on racial identity, **some of us have more clothes**. Modeling Jesus in self-denial starts with acknowledging the self. This is what our brothers and sisters are calling for, when we are asked to examine the reality of **privilege**. Particularly those of us who are white, we have to name the reality of **white privilege**.
 - a) Acknowledging privilege is hard. It requires us to **look at the dirt between our toes**. It requires us to let others look at the dirt. It requires humility about **realities that are painful to acknowledge**. It can be painful to identify how we who are white have benefited from a system that privileges us, **at the expense of others**, and how perhaps that system has shaped how we see the world and even our implicit biases and responses to our brothers and sisters of color. **Even those who reject overt racism will likely find that there's some racially biased dirt on our feet**. We may feel

embarrassed to let Jesus see it, and certainly to let our brothers and sisters of color see it. But until we can be open and honest to the conversation about privilege, we remain part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

- b) **Even the meme I shared in the beginning when you think about it, reveals white privilege.** While I think it communicates well by working within the framework of traditional Christianity it does this through a white privileged lens. This Jesus is a classic looking Jesus picture, **but is this really the face of Jesus?** I would be curious to know when many of us close our eyes and imagine Jesus, when we picture the story I read today, when we see him looking at Peter, or perhaps we try to connect with him personally, even seeing him in our mind's eye looking at us, what does he look like? How many of us, if we're honest, see someone like the Jesus in this meme. Or maybe this one. (White Jesus) Can we acknowledge that **this is the Jesus of European privilege?** This is not the historical Jesus, but he is the Jesus many of us have inherited.
 - c) Archaeologists have been able to model what the historical Jesus likely looked like. **Jesus was a 1st Century Middle Eastern Hebraic man**, and they did not have light skin, light hair, blue eyes. From the best constructions we can depict now, the historical Jesus likely looked something like this. (show image) What do you notice about him? Not anglo, darker skin. Darker hair. **Jesus was Brown.**
 - d) What's my point? **Image has power.** White Jesus is the embodiment of the American normalization of whiteness. Our founding fathers were white men and they set the tone for the normalized face of the American people. Everything else was other. **But this was not truth. It was a not a factual reality.** All that was created was a manufactured garment called whiteness that those of a certain skin pigment were automatically given to wear.
 - e) For decades those in the field of **racial bias training** have used the metaphor of an **invisible backpack** that whites are born with; a back-pack filled with certain tools to use at our disposal. Tools that others don't have. We who are white, the theory goes, use these tools without realizing we have something others are denied. The beginning of service is recognizing the backpacks we wear and deciding whether we're going to hoard what we have, or use it on behalf of others.
4. **So for those of us who have more clothes, how do we disrobe and serve?** (aka **What do we do with our privilege?**) I'm gonna end by suggesting a few things.
- a) **First, we educate ourselves about the issues at hand.** We listen to the experiences of our brothers and sisters. We allow them to help us become more aware of the dirt on our feet.
 - (1) This fall, we're hoping to do a group on race and justice; where we can read, educate ourselves, learn together, be vulnerable before one another, confess, repent, and receive God's forgiveness and empowerment to serve and help.
 - b) **Second, we consciously choose greater vulnerability.**
 - (1) Some of us are afraid to jump in because **we know it will cost us something. It's a risk.** We could offend our friends or family members. We could be judged negatively by them. We could offend our bosses or coworkers. This might even cost us relationships or jobs. We could even find ourselves facing harsher consequences. If we join our African-American brothers and sisters in the streets, will we be arrested?
 - (2) But by choosing safety, **we choose complicity.** Our friends of color don't need allies to safely tweet, they need folks who are willing to make themselves

vulnerable, just as our friends of color are vulnerable. **They need us to risk our garments, to share our backpack items, to put some skin in the game.** On July 9, the day after Philando Castile's death, a few of us went to the demonstration in Oakland. We were there, while the tragedy in Dallas took place. Not gonna lie: at times, it was uncomfortable for us. And we were aware of stepping out of our comfort zones. It was unclear what we'd be doing exactly, but eventually the plan became clear. Our group was taking over the highway. Our experience faltering and choosing to go. What we experienced there.

c) Third: we humbly submit and follow, rather than try to assert our will and lead in solving the problems that need to be solved. We let those who've been affected by the issues most be the ones to provide the solutions.

- (1) By getting behind those who are seeking justice for their communities. Not trying to lead. Not assuming we know better how to get the work done. But by surrendering authority to solve the problems to the people who know best what the problems really are.
- (2) Recently highway shut down in 880. Thousands of people were a part of it. Lots critiqued it. Ben McBride was one of the faith leaders at the front, the one who organized the action and was the voice that spoke to it's purpose. The day after he shared a response on Facebook to a white evangelical who critiques him for setting down the highway, saying he should work the inside game. Work within the system, work with the police department instead of create public disruption. Here was Ben's response:

we've done both. In an airport after sitting on the DOJ Racial Profiling Board, advocated and got body cameras for OPD, volunteered hundreds of hours and trained OPD officers in Fair Policing and Implicit Bias, created a Principled Policing course with DOJ for departments across the state, have coordinated violence reduction efforts in Oakland over 3 years leading to a 40% reduction in homicides. Am currently organizing a statewide campaign around police transformation through a robust platform called HEAT (Hiring. Equipment. Accountability, Training)

I say all this not because I have to, but because I choose to show you how white supremacy creates a lens for you and others to think you've thought of something from afar that we haven't. That you have solutions we don't. That your minimal inconvenience trumps our suffering.

If you didn't have white supremacy as a lens, you would join and learn from the suffering, build humble relationships and listen. Wake up from your dream to other people's nightmare and realize that we are doing what you like to say you enjoyed about Dr. King. You love King because he's already dead, but the white moderates critiqued him in the EXACT way you critiqued me. (Google his Letter from a Birmingham Jail)

So, you just proved why we have to shut freeways down and inconvenience the mainstream. Because your milquetoast orientation to our experience of terror has run its course.

- d) Have so much to learn about how we can help and not be a part of continuing the systems that have brought hurt. How we can truly serve with love. How we can pour ourselves out for one another.

- e) But as we do so, **we stand in the hope** and the assurance from Jesus, that the work of love is worth it. That living the love makes us different. That ultimately, the end point is joy. Jesus said this about his instructions on how to really love: **“I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!”**
- f) We stand in hope that it is possible to live the love that Jesus lived. That he is here empowering us to do it. Love for the oppressed. Love for the scapegoat. Love for the dis-empowered. Love for the privileged. Love for the rich as well as the poor. Love for the officers and for the innocent victims. Because Jesus has served each. Jesus has loved each. And Jesus believed that when we lived the same way, we’d find a joy that overflows. Let it be. Amen.