

Lent 2 – Obvious and Hidden

A Sermon Preached by Zac Klassen

Bloomingtondale Mennonite Church

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Good morning,

It is good to be back after having missed last week's wonderful service while up at the Silver Lake Sr Youth Retreat. We had a fantastic time and we look forward to sharing more about it another time. I listened to the recording of the worship service that I missed, however, and was moved by our congregation's first Sunday of worship in the Lenten journey we've begun together. This year's Lenten theme, "Dwelling in Dissonance," was powerfully explored in worship through the story of Lazarus' death and the grief that ensued not only for Mary and Martha and his friends, but also for Jesus. A sentence from Susan's sermon that stood out for me and that I think nicely holds together the theme of dwelling in dissonance went like this:

"Love does not bypass grief. Love enters it. The dissonance we are invited to notice: Jesus is strong enough to call someone out of a tomb and tender enough to cry in front of his friends; Jesus speaks of glory and is troubled in spirit; Jesus calls for belief and also stands with us in pain. If you have ever felt you needed to choose between faith and grief, I think this story refuses that choice."¹

That last line, "If you have ever felt you needed to choose between faith and grief, I think this story refuses that choice" nicely captures the spirit of this Lenten worship series, which over the next weeks will examine dissonant realities that the Gospels *refuse to choose between* – that they refuse to "resolve" into a neat harmony. The dissonance we are looking at today as we consider the story of foot washing in John 13 is between Jesus' words and actions that have an "obvious" meaning and Jesus' words and actions whose meanings remain "hidden" from us. Or, to put it

¹ From Susan Schwartzentruber's sermon "Messy Grief," preached at Bloomingtondale on February 22, 2026.

differently, today we consider the dissonance between what we “known” and what we “do not known” in the life of faith as we listen to and follow Jesus.

As I thought about this dissonance between the obvious and the hidden or between knowing and not knowing, a funny story came to mind from my time at an academic conference in the US in 2013. The hotel I was staying at served breakfast in the morning and as I approached the coffee station, I noticed a gentleman there who had a puzzled look on his face as he stared at several coffee carafes in front of him – the carafes, it turned out, were unlabeled, making it difficult to know if one was decaf or flavored or what have you. After a few seconds the gentleman noticed me noticing him, looked me in the eyes and said with a concerned look: “do you know what anything is?” (x2) After a brief pause during which I considered this rather profound question, I responded, saying: “I don’t know what anything is.” I kind of like to think of this gentleman’s question as nicely capturing the story from our scripture today. I imagine Peter, like the man staring at the unlabeled coffee carafes, staring at Jesus, seeing his obvious and recognizable features, but having no way to interpret his actions at the time.

In our scripture presentation this morning, this came out as we heard Peter speak the words that, if we are honest, we’ve all spoken numerous times in our own faith journeys: “I don’t understand.....I don’t understand.” For those of us who have heard this story of Jesus washing Peter’s feet many times, the meaning behind it might seem obvious. Jesus was having his last supper with those he loved, and he wanted to show them not only how much he loved them but how he wanted them to love each other, by serving one another. Obvious, right? Obvious to us, maybe, but not to Peter and, perhaps if we too are willing to suspend our assumptions for a moment, it will turn out that what Jesus does in that moment when he stoops to wash his disciples’ feet will not be so obvious after all.

For Peter, Jesus' actions are dissonant because a Lord, a Master, a person in a position of honour and privilege, is not supposed to act like a slave; but that is exactly what Jesus did. In Jesus' day, the social convention was that slaves in households performed this lowly duty – washing the dirty feet of those that belonged to the household. For the disciples, Jesus is God's chosen one, the Messiah, deliverer, the savior, the teacher, their Lord. His actions throughout his ministry have demonstrated this time and time again. He has spoken with authority. He has healed. He has cast out demons. He has taught multitudes. He has turned water to wine. He raised Lazarus from death. And now, he is stooping low to wash dirty, dusty feet. Dissonance. In the first verse of our hymn of preparation this dissonance was nicely illustrated:

The heavens are the Lord's and the earth is his, the clouds are his chariot, glory his cloak.
He made the mountains, set the limits of the sea, and he stooped and washed my feet.

Jesus knows the dissonance is palpable, as palpable as the feeling of Jesus' hands on the disciples' feet. And so, Jesus acknowledges the dissonance: "You do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand. "As I meditated on this passage, it was this phrase that jumped out at me again and again: "You do not know.....but later you will understand."

How often is our understanding of God's work in our lives a mystery now, only to be revealed, in part or in whole, throughout the course of our lives? As I think about this, I think back to an exercise that we had the Sr Youth try this last weekend at Silver Lake. After several pastors shared their own faith stories on Friday night, on Saturday, Kara Carter, Pastor of Elmira Mennonite Church, led us in an exercise of creating a faith journey map or chronology of our life journeys. This exercise is a way not only to nurture self-awareness, but also to encourage us to look back on our journey and ask: "What have you done in my life, O God?" "Where have you been present?" "Where did I not understand what you were doing, but now, today, I am

beginning to understand.” What do I still not understand?” “What might be a mystery right now but later, with God’s help, I will understand?”

Let’s return to our scripture presentation for a moment: After Peter’s confession that he did not understand, Jesus reassures him: “That’s okay. You don’t need to understand now. Simply receive my love.” Jesus doesn’t resolve our uncertainty; he doesn’t make what is hidden plain; he doesn’t explain everything. Instead, he says, “It’s okay. You will understand later.” I still wonder, though, *did* Peter understand later? Was it after Jesus’ death that he finally understood? And, if he did, *what* did he come to understand? One way of answering this question is to say that later, after Jesus’ death, Peter understood that Jesus was showing him that he had to die – that it was all part of God’s plan. I confess that I find myself dissatisfied with this way of answering the question, even if it is correct in one way. I like to think, instead, that Peter later came to understand that it is Jesus’ love, his love that extends “to the end,” that allows blessing to exist even within life’s dissonances. Put differently, I like to think that Peter came to understand that only love can hold together life’s dissonances and transfigure them, through God’s power, into blessing.

If *this* is what Peter came to know, then not understanding until later isn’t about how everything that is mysterious in life will become clear later and there will no longer be any mystery. Rather, understanding later means that our lack of understanding becomes drawn by Jesus into a wider context of love and service so that we no longer need to understand everything to proceed forward in faith. I like to think, then, that Jesus washing Peter’s feet was part of the “understanding later.” Peter would come to understand later, not because he figured Jesus out, but because he began to see how the life that Jesus was calling him to was a life of servanthood, a posture that accepted a lack of understanding and control over the mystery of life. This last

weekend at the Silver Lake Sr Youth retreat, we explored this idea a bit through singing a round from VT #405 - Listen to the Word that God has Spoken. One line that stood out in that song was, “listen even if you don’t understand.” The life of faith, it makes plain, is not one of intellectual mastery, even if it is right and good to seek to understand and to gain knowledge about the path one walks. There is much mystery to the life of faith – a mystery that God calls us into, not that we should run away from.

So, what do you come here today, to this “upper room,” not understanding? What remains hidden to you? What makes you, in your day-to-day life, stand still, staring into space saying: “I don’t know what anything is?” “I don’t understand.” I want these questions to form the basis of a short practice of imaginative meditation together now. I invite you to close your eyes and listen as I invite us into the upper room, ask these questions again, pausing in between for silent reflection and prayer. I will then speak some words of affirmation, and end with a blessing. So, take a moment and ground yourself, take a few deep breaths, and receive this time as an opportunity to welcome God into the dissonance of your own life, whatever that looks like:

Imagine yourself entering the upper room with Jesus. It is a space of gathering, not unlike the dining room table in your house, or your living room. You take a seat with your closest friends and Jesus is there with you. You come feeling confident and blessed. But at some point, you notice Jesus get up and prepare to wash the feet of all of you who are present. In that moment, your confidence turns to uncertainty, and you begin to feel unease. Your emotional guard is suddenly let down. While Jesus prepares the basin, you hear a voice asking you questions, and you take a moment to ask them of yourself:

What do you not understand about your life?

What remains hidden to you?

What makes you say: “I don’t know what anything is...” “I don’t understand?”

Imagine now Jesus approaches you and says, “It’s ok. Receive my love.” You don’t understand in the moment, but somehow you can sense that Jesus is tending to those parts of your body and soul that feel worn out, tired, and dusty. You don’t understand what he has done to you, but somehow you know deep in your soul that his love will accompany you to the end and that later, you will understand.

As you prepare to leave the upper room that night, you again hear a voice, now saying to you

Beloved, leave here with this blessing:

In what is obvious to you and what remains hidden, may God's love pour over you.

In what you know and what you don't know, may God's love hold you.

And may the love of God that pours over you and holds you bring you to a place of blessing so that you may also be a blessing to others. AMEN