



LifeGroup

January 14, 2024

John 13:1-20 and Hebrews 12:1-13

Community

Welcome each other as everyone gathers and spend some time catching up.

THEME FOR TODAY

Just as a child delights in following a parent’s footsteps in the snow, we, as children of God, are invited to follow in Jesus’ footsteps.

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

Today’s text uses the metaphor of running a race. Do you like to run? Walk? Bike? Row? Paddle? Kayak? Other? What is it about this kind of movement that makes you enjoy it? Have you ever done any of these activities as a race? Describe your experience.

Match the running terms to the definition:

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| 1. Bonk | 1. a lightweight tanktop worn by runners |
| 2. Bandit | 2. a runner 40 years of age or older |
| 3. Master | 3. another term for “hitting the wall” |
| 4. Negative splits | 4. a runner who didn’t pay the entry fee or register |
| 5. Singlet | 5. running the second half faster than the first |

(Correct answers: 1-3, 2-4, 3-2, 4-5, 5-1)

PRAY TOGETHER

God, you have gifted us with your Son, Jesus, the Christ whose life of servanthood is an example for all of us. We want to follow you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, break into our existence and change us. Change our vision, attitudes and priorities. Through Christ, allow us to be Christ for our neighbor. Amen.

Content

Hebrews was a letter written to a community that was new to the faith and had come under considerable strain. You can imagine that, after the initial rush of energy and excitement generated by the proclamation of the gospel for this community, there came a stark reality that the life they had known was shrinking, and was no longer accessible to them. They were considered heretics, not allowed in the synagogues. There was a social price to pay that might have created economic hardship.

In this text, the author is doing more than giving a pep talk. The author is proclaiming that they are not alone, telling them that there is an example to follow, and inviting them to follow that example. Without the invitation to follow, the race doesn’t make any sense.

(Ask someone to read Hebrews 12:1-13 aloud and for others to follow in their Bibles, or for all to read aloud together.) How does this text speak to us today?

In this “race” of life we have a fixed point of reference. Our pioneer and perfecter is our example. Usually the pioneer is not the perfecter. Usually someone or something comes along after the pioneer to perfect what the pioneer has done. The proclamation that Jesus is both pioneer and perfecter leaves us with the question of what is there for *us* to do. In terms of our salvation, nothing. Jesus has done it all.

Being faithful by following in the footsteps of Jesus through this life is hard. Words like “persevere” and “endure” would not be necessary if it wasn’t hard. Yet we are not alone. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, those who are presently with us, those who have come before us and those who will come after us.

We then understand the meaning of the cross. Sin is heavy and weighs us down. How do we lay aside sin and the hampering weight? We do not lay aside sin. That is work of the cross of Christ.

However, we can lay aside the labels that sin tries to place on us. We believe that the cross of Jesus defines us and frees us so that we might be able to follow. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we live into the promise of the cross.

The spirit thus makes us holy. We are made holy to follow the example of Jesus: to seek justice, peace, truth, and beauty, to break down barriers and reach across boundaries. In all ways, we are to seek these things in the ordinary. That is our race, and it takes perseverance and endurance.

But it also takes discipline: discipline to the promise of the cross and to the example of Jesus.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

We aren’t the only ones following Jesus. There’s a cloud of witnesses in this race. Name some of the people you have in your cloud of witnesses. How are we defined by the cross of Christ? In what ways do you see yourself following the example of Jesus?

GOING DEEPER

(Ask someone to read John 13:1-20 aloud and for others to follow in their Bibles, or for all to read aloud together.)

We should understand the importance and radical nature of Jesus washing his disciple's feet. Foot washing was a courtesy to a guest, but was usually done by a slave, servant, or the host's wife as the guests entered the house or reclined before a meal. In a sandal-wearing culture, you can imagine how amazingly dirty feet became.

The text tells us that the meal was already in progress, which means a foot washing would have already taken place. So Jesus was not washing their feet to clean them. This was a teaching moment, and it confused the disciples, especially Peter.

To be a rabbi was a big deal, and to be a disciple meant that you were subject to your rabbi. You could never be above your rabbi, but the goal was to become like your rabbi. John echoes a common theme that we see in Mark 10:43-44, Matthew 20:26-27, and Luke 18:27. However, this is not just a text about humble service. Jesus' example is much bigger than that. The full extent of Jesus' love for his disciples is demonstrated to them on the cross. The example of Jesus that we are to follow is to die and rise with Christ. It is only then that following the example of Jesus makes sense. Everything else just turns into a "good works" race.

Out of this good works theology comes questions like "what would Jesus do?" This cultural phenomenon has produced some good works. There are many church missions who have not been particularly concerned with proclaiming the gospel, but have been very passionate about working for peace and justice around the world, including homeless work, food and clothing ministry, donations to natural disasters and mission trips. There has been an attitude of work and ministry as an active thing.

But for Lutheran Christians, the question is different: "what has Jesus done?" This question brings us to a real understanding of the freedom of the promise, and our response as new creations moving into the civil world with loving hearts and hands. This is a powerful witness to the gospel. Without this understanding, the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" work ethic that has been instilled in our culture can bring us dangerously close to a departure from the gospel.

There are good works to be done. Luther's explanations of the Ten Commandments push us deep into an active civil role with our neighbor and community. The problem comes when there is a hierarchy of good. We can only engage in the world because of the goodness of God. We don't do it, God does.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

In what ways do we "wash the feet" of one another in our culture? In what specific ways do we follow our rabbi? Discuss the difference between "what would Jesus do" and "what has Jesus done."

Application

What are some specific ways that you can engage with our community and your neighbor this week? Pick one of these ideas and follow through on it. Report back to the group next week. What happened?

PRAY TOGETHER

Come, Holy Spirit, and break into our existence and change us. This week, teach us how to be Christ for our neighbor. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, make us holy to follow the example of Jesus by seeking justice, peace, truth, and beauty, breaking down barriers and reaching across boundaries. We pray that you will work in us and through us in the coming week. Amen.

SENDING

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Stewardship

HEBREWS 13:5-6

Christian stewardship begins with an understanding that all we have comes from and belongs to God. We simply steward what belongs to God. Seems simple, right? Talk to someone about tithing – giving at least 10% of your income, before taxes, to the work of God in this world. What emotions does it evoke? Why are most people reluctant to live this way? How does this scripture speak into the heart of God's stewards – you and me? Can we be faithful and not tithe? Why or why not?

Scripture Readings for January 14, 2024 LifeGroup

John 13:1-20 NLT 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. (18) "I am not saying these things to all of you; I know the ones I have chosen. But this fulfills the Scripture that says, 'The one who eats my food has turned against me.' (19) I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I AM the Messiah. (20) I tell you the truth, anyone who welcomes my messenger is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me."

Hebrews 12:1-13 NLT Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. (2) We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. (3) Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. (4) After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin. (5) And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. (6) For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child." (7) As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? (8) If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. (9) Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? (10) For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. (11) No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. (12) So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. (13) Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.