

The Disciple Who Missed Easter

John 13

March 31, 2002

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At the beginning of our message this morning, we want to take a moment to reflect on the tragic death of a very important person. Larry La Prise, the man who wrote the “Hokey-Pokey,” died recently at the age of 83. The most traumatic part for his family was getting him into the coffin. They put his left foot in . . . well, things just got crazy after that . . . “And that’s what it’s all about” . . . *Easter*.

Easter means life conquers death, and mercy triumphs over judgment.

Easter means God has washed the curse away so we can dance out of the tomb, for our world suffers under a curse because of our sin. Our dead hearts are entombed in shame.

God hates dead hearts . . . but He loves us.

God hates sin . . . but He loves sinners.

God hates dirt . . . but He loves His dirty children.

When my son Coleman was two years old, they made Mother’s Day cards in Sunday School. The first line said, “My mommy’s favorite thing is . . .” and then the teacher wrote in what Coleman had told her: “My mommy’s favorite thing is . . . cleaning me up.”

I said, “I think her favorite thing is holding you once she’s cleaned you up.”

Easter means you’re clean, for God entered our dead world in Jesus. On the cross He became sin *for* us and took our judgment. Like a giant wash towel He soaked up the sins of the world and released us from the bondage of Hell.

Easter is the Grand Opening.

The tomb was opened;

The temple sanctuary was opened;

The heart of God was opened.

And now His Spirit enters our dead, insane, little, self-centered worlds and opens them to Heaven.

Easter means everything. “For this is God’s plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ, and through Christ to reconcile to Himself all things, making peace by the blood of His cross.” He washes all creation in His own life blood.

So it’s finished . . . accomplished in all eternity. But God is unwrapping it now in the fullness of time.

Easter is life.
Easter is forgiveness.
Easter is the fulfillment of all your deepest longings.
Easter is dancing the Hokey-Pokey on your grave.
Easter is literally everything good.

So what's the catch? Everything has a catch.

- The catch in Islam is, you have to obey all the rules and get ticked off about everything.
- The catch in Hinduism is, you have to appease a couple thousand demon-gods, and if you're good you get to be a cow.
- The catch in Buddhism is, you have to meditate in a cave until you become nothing.
- The catch in Judaism is, you have to keep all the commandments.

What's the catch in Christianity? With Easter?

One guy missed it. In the text Gary read (Matthew 28), Jesus rises from the dead and appears to the . . . *eleven* disciples. One guy's missing. His name is Judas. Why did he miss Easter?

Did Jesus not love Judas? Was it because Judas was just *too bad*? . . . like Peter was maybe a 7 on the Bad Guy Scale, and Judas was an 8? And the love of Jesus can cover 7's but not 8's?

Why did Judas miss Easter? What's the catch?

John 13:

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love [or he loved them to the utmost].

How *does* God love us?

An old Dutch priest used to tell about the day, as a child, when he overheard his father talking to a neighbor in the kitchen. The neighbor said, "Joe, you've got thirteen children. Which is your favorite? Which do you love most?"

As a boy with his ear pressed to the door, the priest heard his father say:

Oh, that's easy. That's Mary, my twelve-year-old. She just got braces, and she feels so awkward she won't leave the house.

But the one I love most is Michael. He's uncoordinated . . . terrible at sports. So the other kids tease him, and he feels so ashamed.

But the apple of my eye is Susan. She's twenty-four and living in her own apartment. She's developing a drinking problem, and she takes it out on me. I cry for Susan.

But I guess of all my kids . . .

The old priest said his father went on to mention each of his children by name. He said, "I learned that the one my father loved most was the one who needed him most at the time."

Why does God love you? Because you're so impressive?

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "A person who has bathed is already clean [some ancient manuscripts add, accept for his feet]. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

"Do you understand?" Knowing He's from God, He takes off His robe and descends in humility, taking the form of a slave, and washes their feet. In the morning He'll be stripped naked and crucified as a slave . . . to wash their lives with His own blood and then rise on the third day, ascending to His place in glory.

And now He's ascended to His place at the meal and asks, "Do you understand?" No, they don't understand. Later they will, on Easter. (But Judas won't be there.)

Verse 21: *After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.*

One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."

Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.

It appears Jesus has placed Judas to His left in the place of honor at the feast. He has washed his feet, and now He gives Him the choice morsel, which was for the favored guest. Augustine thinks this symbolizes communion. Whatever the case, it's incredible *grace* on Jesus' part. But the grace of Jesus is like judgment: What you *do* with it *is* judgment.

As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor.

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

So these guys come to the Last Supper and refuse to wash each other's feet, so Jesus does it. Then Judas leaves to betray Him. Next Peter vows that he'll never deny Jesus. Before the night was over, they will all abandon Him.

Why does Jesus love these guys? . . . traitors with stinky feet?

"Which one do you love most, Jesus?"

Oh, that would have to be John. He's a hothead . . . Son of Thunder.

Actually, it would be Peter. He's as stable as a pound of Jell-O.

But *most*? The apple of my eye? That would have to be Judas . . .

Is that *possible*?! Could it be?

When Judas came to Gethsemane with the soldiers, do you remember what Jesus called Him? He called him *friend*. "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay his life down for his friends." It's like the love of God in Jesus has *nothing* to do with the merit of the person who receives it. In fact, their lack of merit—their need—just seems to draw the love out of Him.

God is love.
And He loves to love to the utmost.

That night He told them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this supper with you. This is my body broken and my blood shed."

Maybe His favorite thing is loving to the utmost. Maybe Coleman was right, and Susan's favorite thing is "cleaning him up." She sure jumps at the opportunity! The issue is whether or not he'll let her.

Which of my children do I love the most? . . . does the father love the most?

- Coleman, when he's covered in dirt.
- Becky, when she's feeling dejected and lonely.
- John, when he's in trouble and insecure.
- Elizabeth, when she rebels and shuts me out and enters her own little world.

When Elizabeth was little and I was lecturing her for telling a lie, I turned around and saw she had her fingers in her ears. She was singing, "It's a small world after all; it's a small world after all; it's a small world after all; it's a small, small world."

We have all done that to God, and we curse ourselves with a small world in which He is shut out and we reign supreme. I believe it's called Hell.

But our Father's world is immense and eternal! It's Easter—Heaven!

A couple years ago Elizabeth got mad over something and lied to us. And with her friend next door she ran away. When I realized she had lied, I was *furious*. When I realized she might be gone, I was *terrified*.

Fortunately, they only made it a few miles and decided to turn around, but the sheriff still picked them up on Highway 285. After he dropped off the prodigals and asked some questions, I took Elizabeth inside. She thought she would be grounded for life. But by then I didn't care about all that. I just hugged her—loved her.

As she sat on my lap, she came undone . . . weeping, sobbing, snot all over. She looked like she was dying. She cried, "Oh, I love you *so much*, and I'll never do that again!"

What's my favorite thing? Well, I'd never known such intense love for my daughter. And I doubt she'd ever known such intense love for me. She'd let me into her angry, little, small world, and we shattered it with love—a grand opening. It hurt like a cross, and I hope it never happens again. Yet my favorite thing was cleaning up my daughter and washing her rebellious heart.

A pastor I know said he once prayed, "Jesus, I can hardly wait to see you [Easter]. I want to ask you all the questions I've ever thought of." Then he prayed, "Jesus, what would you like to do when we meet face to face?" He said he heard Jesus say, "Oh, John, I just want to wash your feet." At that he was undone . . . weeping, sobbing, snot all over, like he was *dead* . . . and alive.

Jesus loves *so intensely* it can be hard to take . . . for Him *and* for you. Forgiveness can be pretty hard to take. Letting Him wash your feet is not always easy to do. Ask Peter.

How many of you have ever attended one of those Christian foot-washing services, where you knew your feet would be washed? How many of you washed your feet before you went? But then it wasn't really foot-washing! It was foot-displaying.

My mom used to make us clean the house before the cleaning lady came. Maybe she wanted to impress the cleaning lady more than trust the cleaning lady.

People actually say, "I can't come to the Lord's Supper because I've sinned." What the hell do you think it's for? It's for washing away sin . . . washing away Hell. Stop coming to the Lord's table trying to impress Him rather than trust Him. Let the Lord wash you . . . really wash you. It will undo you.

Do you remember what Peter said when Jesus came to wash his feet?

(The disciples had been competing for places of honor and power, trying to impress Jesus. And now Jesus, King of Glory and Lord of Power, humbles Himself and wants to wash Peter's feet?)

It's not just embarrassment over stinky feet, or some particular sin. If the King of Glory takes the place of a slave and washes your feet, it's an *insult* to your entire view of reality. It turns your little world of self-advancement upside down and blows it apart.

So Peter says, "No! You'll never wash my feet!" — "Jesus, I'll take care of my own dirt. I'll impress you; I'll earn your love; I'll earn your grace."

"Listen, Peter," says Jesus. "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me." — "Unless I wash you, you miss Easter."

So then Peter tries to clean himself up. I think he's thinking, "Okay, if getting washed is the game, I'll do it *best*. I'll *earn* it." He says, "Jesus, not just my feet, but my hands and my head too!"

We think we can pay for forgiveness with great repentance. But our shame, self-loathing, despair, and those good deeds do not impress God. It's all *you* trusting *you*, and you cannot pay. You cannot buy *you* forgiveness, because *you* is what needs to be forgiven. The *you* is dead in sin.

To really receive forgiveness is to die to yourself.

Easter is being forgiven the debt of Hell.

Easter is being washed with the blood of Jesus—God in flesh.

Easter is receiving everything by grace when you deserve destruction.

In God's kingdom everything is a gift! You can't pay for Easter. And that's the catch.

That's the catch: Easter is free.

- So entirely free it blows your self-centered, little world to smithereens . . .
- So entirely free your pride must die—self must die . . .
- So entirely free that Peter can do *nothing*.

Jesus says, “Stop, Peter. You’re clean.”

Yet in just a few hours Peter would fail (deny Jesus three times), and Jesus knew it. But when Peter saw his failure, he wept—he was undone—he died to himself. He had trusted Jesus to wash him.

Judas would also fail (hand Jesus to the priests). But when he saw *his* failure, he would not die to himself. He tried to pay for himself *with* himself. He hadn’t trusted Jesus to wash him.

In one way, Peter and Judas were so much alike.

- They were both thoroughly loved by Jesus.
- They were both led astray by Satan himself.
- They both sinned horribly against their Lord.

In fact, if you didn’t know the rest of the story, I bet most of you would consider Judas the better of the two . . . the more responsible.

In Matthew 27 when Judas sees Jesus is condemned to die, he takes the money back to the temple (Matthew says he repented), and there he declares Jesus innocent, like the priests declared the sacrificial lamb innocent before it was sacrificed.

Judas cries out, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!” The priests say, “That’s your responsibility—your problem.” And Judas believed them. He believed it was *his* problem and *he* must pay . . . for he was lord of his own, damned, little world.

So Judas took the money and threw it into the sanctuary. And then he went and hanged himself.

Judas tried to pay for Easter.

Peter and Judas were so much alike yet as different as Heaven and Hell. One believed grace, and one did not. So Judas repented . . . and killed himself. Peter *died* to himself . . . then repented. Peter was washed . . . then he turned around.

Throughout his life, again and again and again, Peter kept going back to Jesus . . . like a dance, believing grace. And he became “The Rock” (just who Jesus said he was from the start). So Judas missed that first Easter. Whether or not Judas missed Easter for all eternity is not a question that we are allowed to answer.

But it's Easter today, and I don't want you to miss it. "Unless I wash you," says Jesus, "you have no part in me." Unless He washes you, you've missed it.

A few weeks ago on our first Sunday in this building, quite a while after the last service had ended Sheila Corley came up to me and said, "Peter, something is really wrong with Jason. He's so shaken up he can't tell me what it is."

Jason was on our youth staff for a while. He works at Project Cure now. He's a pretty level guy, so I thought, "Oh great. What now?"

I walked over to where Jason was sitting, and sure enough he was doubled over . . . weeping, sobbing, snot all over. I said, "Jason, can I pray for you?" He said, "Oh, man, yeah." I said, "What's wrong?" Through his tears he said:

I was just sitting here at the end of the service, and I looked up at the cross and I saw Jesus there. Then He got down off the cross and walked over to my seat, knelt down in front of me, and started washing my feet. He washed my feet! And then He wrapped His arms around me and hugged me.

Then Jason looked up at me and bellowed, "I don't deserve that! And now I don't know what to do!"

I looked at him a moment . . . laughed and said, "What do you *want* to do?" I wasn't trying to be a smart aleck; I just knew it was Easter for Jason. And whatever Jason wanted to do that moment he wanted to do with a clean heart, and so it was good.

He mumbled something I didn't understand . . . but I think he probably wanted to love God and love his neighbor as himself . . . tell people Jesus is risen . . . wash feet and hang on crosses too . . . dance the Hokey-Pokey on his grave.

I may not know you, but I know something about you. You're a sinner like me. We could make a long list: greed, lust, adultery, pornography, gossip, prostitution, murder . . . all kinds of dirt. And if you say you have no sin, you are most deceived.

But the greatest sin is you thinking you can pay for your sins. The biggest sin is you trying to be the lord and savior of your own, small world. The biggest sin is you trying to wash yourself.

But He loves you more than I could possibly say. He longs to hear you speak to Him. He rose from the dead and is here right now.

So speak to God now in the silence of your own heart: "Jesus, save me. Wash me. Be the Lord of my world."

He's here. He's at your feet, the King of Glory stooped over a basin, a towel in His hands. He loves you. Picture Him there in faith.

Imagining what God says is true is called *faith*. You don't have to have some wild experience; just trust. Watch Him wash your feet. Don't argue; don't promise anything; don't vow anything; just let Him wash your feet. Now listen for His whisper: "You're clean."

Every time you feel guilty, ask Him to wash you. But in eternity and in truth, you are already clean. He's just unwrapping Easter for you in space and time.

What I'm saying is, you're saved. And it's His love that turns us around.

So you put your left foot in . . . and He washes it.
You put your left foot in . . . and you shake it all about.
Do the Hokey-Pokey and *then* you turn yourself around.
That's what it's all about!

Amen.

"Thank you, Father, that you are not a God who desired robots. You're not a God who desired slaves. You wanted children sitting on your lap, a bride wrapped in your arms. You wanted *us*. Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen."

Further Reading

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. . . . After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

-John 13:1-11, 21-30

Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"

-Matthew 26:49-50

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

-John 15:13

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death; and they bound him and led him away and delivered him to Pilate the governor. When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

-Matthew 27:1-10

After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

-Matthew 26:73-75

And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." . . . Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

-Matthew 28:9-10, 16-20

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. . . . Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

-Hebrews 7:25, 10:19-22

I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

-Revelation 7:14-17

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

-Romans 6:23

"Hell is a state of mind And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind—is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. . . .

"The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words 'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.' There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy—that is, to reality. Ye see it easily enough in a spoiled child that would sooner miss its play and its supper than say it was sorry and be friends. Ye call it the Sulks. But in adult life it has a hundred fine names . . . Revenge and Injured Merit and Self-Respect and Tragic Greatness and Proper Pride. . . .

"A damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see."

"Then no one can ever reach them?"

"Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend—a man can sympathise with a horse but a horse cannot sympathise with a rat. Only One has descended into Hell."

-C. S. Lewis, The Great Divorce

Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

-Ephesians 4:8-10

The vault above us is not deaf because the universe is an idiot; the silence is not the heartless silence of an endless and aimless world. Rather the silence around us is a small and pitiful stillness like the prompt stillness in a sickroom. We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear.

-G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every

creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!"

-Revelation 5:11-13

A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of God.

-Thomas Merton

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