

## In the world: strong in the present with Jesus

This week I read in the newspaper an article entitled, “*I want to be a light for others*”. A young ballet dancer had overcome many setbacks—including a war-torn youth in Africa and some injuries that threatened her being able to dance ever again. She has come to terms with her traumatic background, even though she says she still, now and then, has nightmares, and she has regained her strength—so she is dancing better than ever. Her attitude has changed, though. She says she NOW wants to help others who have had rough experiences like she had. I admire this woman. By also focusing on loving others, she has gained a wider picture of what it means to dance as she was always ‘meant to’.

Dancing is a great metaphor. How can we also learn to dance ‘as we are meant to’? Most of us have **good intentions** to love those around us, but when it comes down to it, we find it **difficult**. Why is this? Many reasons, but I think that one of the main reasons we struggle is that human beings are **people ‘of the moment’**. And in the moment, I can really do only **one thing**. This seems obvious, right? I can’t cook Lans’ dinner if I’m busy finishing off a painting. My head is literally in the painting. With the long days in the summer, there have been times when he’s come out to check, around 20u—if dinner will be on its way at some point? The circumstances have kept me from cooking. **Fortunately for Lans**, the days are getting shorter, so I can’t paint as long into the evening...

Would you agree that, In order to love people practically, *not just in theory*, we need to learn to live more in the moment— even though it seems like there is always something else calling out to us to do? ‘Living in the moment’ has for some time been a **hot topic**. We’re busier than ever, and we long to be able to slow down enough to enjoy the present moment. The banner of *Mindfulness* offers people a range of ideas and methods—we see them everywhere. I believe that our society’s desire for mindful living is a **signal** of a deeper need **we all share to make the most of the time we have**.

**We are followers of Jesus.** Let’s learn from him how he lived in the moment— because **he shows us** that God has certain ideas about how we can **occupy the present moment** in a meaningful way.

Our central Bible text this morning is found in John 13, where John is describing the last Passover meal Jesus ate with his disciples:

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 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.

There follows an account of foot washing. Today we’re *not* going to talk extensively about what it meant that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. We’re going to **focus on how Jesus found the strength** to serve his disciples when he was under extreme stress. During that meal Jesus knew he would be facing betrayal, arrest and crucifixion in the next 24 hours.

Stress makes many of us focus inward or seek escape. But in this time of stress, Jesus made the most of the **present moment in order to show them the full extent of his love**, verse 1b

**For Jesus, his goal is love.** Jesus shows us that **occupying the present in a meaningful way** has to do with LOVE. Jesus is determined to show the disciples his love. Let’s not skip ahead too quickly. **Slow down to look at verse 3.**

There seems to be something going on in Jesus' soul **before** he stood up to wash their feet. Jesus is drawing on some knowledge. Looking at Verse 3, we see the word '**know**'. This is a different Greek word than knowing facts. John is saying that Jesus deeply understood some things through **experience**. **Horao** is the kind of knowing that is 'bone-deep', we might say.

The text says Jesus had deep experience of three things about his **identity**.

1. That the **father** had *given* him **authority**: he was set free to act (in John 10:18 he says **No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.**)
2. That he came from God: he was beloved Son
3. That he was returning to God: his future is full of love with his Father

John is describing the evening. He seems to be showing that Jesus first strengthened himself with the truths of his identity. Then he was able to love in the difficult moment. If we rush on too quickly to the foot washing account, we might miss it. But it is there—before Jesus does anything for the disciples, he first 'gets a grip'. He allows the truths he **knows** to become a **fresh part** of him. In order to be loving in that moment, He first **strengthens himself**. This is not a luxury to Jesus! It feels as if the **penny is dropping** for the disciples: they are getting a glimpse into the **spiritual habit** Jesus had of strengthening himself in the love of the Father. Can we also strengthen ourselves in God? **Where** do I get the phrase 'strengthen yourself in God'?

Let's look at 'a day in David's life'

1 Samuel 30:6 describes a grim situation. While David and his men were away fighting, the enemy captured all their wives and children:

**Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.**

In their bitterness, the men blamed their leader and wanted to kill him. David made the choice then to strengthen himself in God. If you read on, you'll see in the next verse that David seeks God's wisdom and that God tells him the right strategy to recover all the captives.

I love a happy ending. But in doing the 'happy ending' dance, let's not rush by a very important insight here: **David** – imperfect man who makes mistakes just like we do— **made himself strong in the Lord** before he raced out to recover the captives – and even before he petitioned God for practical help. Making himself strong in the Lord was not a luxury, but a necessity. Just like David, we are people **who may have regrets** about a less-than-perfect past. We have **worries about our future** and we **face challenges in the present**.

We ask ourselves, will we be enough? God wants to be our strength and our shield—Not only in impossible situations of stress but also in normal life... **... and the 'list of three things Jesus knew' is also OUR list.**

Let's use the same list of three to see why. Going down the list:

1. **Do we have authority from God, Are we free to act? YES.** We are made in his image and likeness. Two weeks ago Lans gave us a great illustration of this. He preached about the Proverbs 31 woman. And he showed us that she is actually 'all of us'. This means that her wise husband is God. And God is looking for a partner to work with him in this world. Like the husband in the proverb puts his trust in his spouse, God puts his trust in his people. He gives us authority to act in this world. We are free to be entrepreneurs in God's household because he trusts us.
2. Is our identity, our origin, found in him? Yes, our origin is a loving heavenly father. He has always known us, always loved us and seen our potential. Jesus taught us to pray **our father**
3. Is our future safe with him? Yes, Romans 8:38-39: **"for I am persuaded that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

We human beings have the amazing gift from God **of being able to choose** what we will do. Today we see that we can choose to accept **God's opinion of us**, no matter what is going on. So, *how can we strengthen ourselves in God?* The **short answer** is to grab hold of these identity truths every time *you feel challenged or off-balance* in any way. One sign of being off-balance is **when you notice that you're not really 'present' in the moment with the people around you.**

The Lord wants us to live together in the love HE has for us. But first we have to put on our own oxygen masks, like passengers in the airplane. The way each of us does this is very personal. Quite often we know what works best for us—\

I mentioned at the beginning the dancer who came through a dark time— and was strengthened to become a dancer who encourages and inspires others.. This didn't happen overnight for her.

**It's a process**—also for us. God is inviting us this morning to take a step like Jesus showed us at the Passover supper—God's voice is always gentle, respecting our freedom.

What is he saying to you today?

#### **huisgroepen:** questions you might ask to 'go deeper'

what has your day *today* been like?

Sometimes it's harder than other times to live 'in the present moment'. If we reflect, we might notice that we are feeling 'out of balance'-- worried or angry, for example. The feelings we experience might have their **roots** in 'our own opinion' of our identity (past or future).

- Have you ever noticed this?
- Do you feel that Jesus can help you 'trade in' your own opinion for God's opinion of you?

Look over the 'list of three for us'. Is there any one identity-item that speaks to you *right now*?

The Lord wants to strengthen you also in your everyday life. How do you feel about that?

**prayer.** Jesus, thank you. Father meet us, Holy Spirit empower us. We trust in you, God. We trust that you have placed us where we are in our lives, in our jobs, in our families—and nothing is too small for you. We want our moments to be meaningful. Show us how our past and our future are in your hands. Show us what this means practically for each of us today, this week, to dwell in your love. Bless us so we can be a blessing. Amen