

The Bible passage we read today describes the scene of the Lord Jesus' final meal with His disciples in Jerusalem. This scene, made famous by Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper", is a particularly striking moment when we look back on Jesus' final week—a scene without which we cannot speak of Holy Week. Reading today's chapter 13, we see that just before this meal took place, in the evening, Jesus took off His outer garment, took a towel, tied it around His waist, drew water into a basin, and began to wash His disciples' feet. In Jewish culture, when hosting a large banquet, such as a wedding feast, guests would wash their hands and feet before the meal so they could dine comfortably. Feet were washed because the footwear worn by Jews at that time was crude, like sandals, and their feet were often dirty with mud and dust. The task of washing the guests' feet was typically performed by a slave. However, on this evening, Jesus Himself washed the disciples' feet with water and dried them with a towel tied around His waist. Why did Jesus do such an act? It seems He did so to show, by exemplifying, that living as a Christian means, above all else, living as a servant of God.

This happened about ten years ago, when I was serving at my previous church. I was visiting the home of a middle-aged parishioner. He was getting on in years, and his legs had grown weak, making it difficult for him to attend worship services as he had before. He had once served as the chair of the building committee and had worked tirelessly to build our current church building. After reminiscing about the past for a while, he suddenly said, "By the way, Pastor Kimura, would you take a look at my feet?" He had played tennis for many years. However, he told me that his flat feet had become so severe that he could no longer play tennis. When he took off his socks and I saw his bare feet, I instinctively reached out and touched them. Thinking that he had been taking the bus and walking all the way to church with feet like that, my heart swelled with emotion. I believe that showing someone your bare feet is something that likely cannot be done without a relationship of trust. The Lord Jesus, with that very trust, reached out His hands to the feet of each of His disciples, washed their dirty feet, and dried them with a towel. I am not Simon Peter, but I feel like saying, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" and pulling back the foot I had extended, thinking, "Isn't our position reversed?" I feel as if I can know that sentiment.

And so, the act of Jesus washing his disciples' feet—the washing of the feet—comes to an end. The disciples all took their seats at the table, surrounding Jesus. Incidentally, when Jews ate, they did not sit in chairs. Once the food was laid out on a low table, they would recline around the table, resting on their left elbows, and eat with their free right hands. Therefore, Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" is not a depiction of the actual meal but a work of fiction. Now, if we read verse 23, it states that the disciple whom Jesus loved was seated right next to him. "At Jesus's side," with his elbow resting on the table, refers to the position to his right. The disciple whom Jesus loved was there. It is believed that this disciple was John himself. If we read John 21, the final chapter of this Gospel, it states that this beloved disciple wrote this Gospel. In this Gospel, this beloved disciple is portrayed as having a higher standing than Peter. For example, in John 20, which describes Jesus' resurrection, it is written that when they received the report from Mary Magdalene, this disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first. Furthermore, in chapter 21, among those who had been fishing all night on the Sea of Galilee, it was this disciple whom Jesus loved who, upon seeing the risen Jesus, cried out, "It is the Lord!" This disciple of love occupies a special place in the Gospel of John.

However, alongside John, there was another person in a position worthy of note: Judas. He is the one of whom the Lord Jesus says in verse 26 today, "It is the one to whom I give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." There is only one seat from which Jesus, lying down, could hand a piece of bread directly to someone. That is the seat to Jesus's left. The reason I say this is that in Jewish tradition, the reclining chairs placed before the banquet table were designed to seat three people. At today's meal, Jesus is presiding over the banquet as the "tablemaster." Who serves as the tablemaster in your household? Usually, it might be your mother who takes on that role. However, when it comes to hot pot dishes, your father—who is usually in the background—might step forward and become the so-called "hot pot master," serving portions into bowls. By the way, in the Middle East, including Palestine, the act of the host—who is the tablemaster—personally serving food to a guest at the table was a special sign of friendship. For example, imagine you were invited to dine at an Arab home. If the host were to cut the finest, thickest cut of meat from the whole roasted lamb right in front of you and

serve it to you, what would happen? It would be quite a challenge! Because you would absolutely have to finish it all. Here, Judas is receiving bread directly from the Lord Jesus. Judas was loved by Jesus. Yet even seeing this, the disciples did not realize that Judas was the disciple who would betray Jesus (verse 28). Why was that? It seems likely because Jesus always gave food to Judas in this manner. To the disciples, it did not appear to be anything special. The Bible tells us that this very Judas would betray Jesus.

There are many things we do not understand about Judas' betrayal. Why did Judas betray Jesus, even though he was so deeply loved by Him? Furthermore, according to this Gospel, it is written that Jesus seemed to have foreseen Judas' betrayal. Yet why did Jesus not stop it? In fact, if we read verse 28, He even tells Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Why did He speak words that seemed to encourage Judas' betrayal? One possible explanation is that the Lord Jesus saw in Judas' betrayal the sin inherent in all human beings. The Gospel writer John certainly did not view Judas as a completely different, utterly beyond-redemption person compared to you, the reader. In fact, deep down in our hearts, do we not all know what it means to betray someone? We know what it means to love someone and to be loved in return; we know what pure love feels like. Yet within us, feelings of jealousy, dissatisfaction, and anger at the other person's cold response can well up. We even feel hatred, thinking, "I care so deeply about you, yet you don't understand that." These inescapable "negative emotions" that creep into the human heart sprout the more we love someone.

Judas, too, was a disciple who loved Jesus, believed in Him, and had dedicated his life to Him. Perhaps even Jesus Himself could do nothing about the darkness that had taken root in Judas's heart. In the lists of Jesus's twelve disciples found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Judas Iscariot is always mentioned last. This is likely because Judas was the very last of the twelve to become a disciple of Jesus. Furthermore, "Iscariot" means "man from Kerioth," and Kerioth is a place name located in the southern region of Judea, not in Galilee. If so, this means that Judas was the only one among Jesus' disciples who was not from Galilee. He was a serious and responsible man, entrusted with the role of treasurer. It is likely that the Lord Jesus recognized special abilities in him as well. However, he was unable to join the close-knit group of fishermen—Peter, James, and John—who were the first to become disciples. Perhaps he felt like an outsider, the only one left out. For one reason or another, his love for Jesus may have gradually turned into resentment and hatred.

Or, as other scholars suggest, if the term "Iscariot" refers to the name of a group of Jewish nationalists known as the "Sicarii," Judas may have intended to use Jesus's fame and his ability to stir up the masses to drive the Romans out of Palestine. However, after participating in Jesus' movement for several years, he may have become disillusioned with Jesus upon seeing that he showed no inclination whatsoever to resist Rome. Judas became a disciple with high hopes and dreams, expecting Jesus to exercise his power as the Messiah. Yet, far from fighting against Rome, he was disappointed to see Jesus walking toward the cross. That is also a possibility. In any case, the Bible does not explicitly explain the reason for Judas' betrayal. Is it not because, to varying degrees, there is a Judas within each of our hearts as well? Judas is by no means a figure living in a completely different world, unrelated to us. We, too, could become Judas. We are weak people who, while claiming to love Jesus, love ourselves even more; and while saying we will follow Jesus, are all too easily tempted to drift away from God. That is precisely why the Gospel writer is trying to tell us: "You should be able to know Judas's feelings."

And so, after receiving the bread from Jesus, Judas rose from his seat and went out into the darkness of the night. Judas would go on to betray Jesus. Finally, I will conclude this message by posing a question: Did Judas fall into hell? The systematic theologian K. Barth remains silent on this question. However, Barth says, "I believe that Christ was crucified even for this Judas who betrayed Jesus."

God is the One who still desires the salvation of even a sinner who betrays Him. Judas Iscariot is by no means a figure living in some other world unknown to us. Rather, Judas lives within us. And Jesus loves and forgives us just as we are. Therefore, this is not to say that it is acceptable to become like Judas. Rather, it is to say that we must not become like Judas. Jesus desires that we fight against our own sin. I want to be amazed by God's love—the love of the Lord Jesus—which is so deep, so vast, and so great. I want to be moved by God's love, which was so great that He was willing to let His only Son die. I am led to desire to be sensitive to God's love.

I pray for you.