

Welcome into the Household of God: The Foot Washing in John 13

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THERE ARE as many different views on the sources, history of development, and structure of John 13 as there are commentaries.¹ Alongside these differing views are opinions on how to understand Jesus' act of foot washing. The text itself appears to offer two different interpretations:² (1) vv. 6-11 promise understanding of the meaning later, a reference to a time after the events of Jesus' "hour" (see 2:22; 12:16); these verses also suggest that this act of foot washing enables the disciples to participate in Jesus' "hour";³ (2) vv. 12-15 then appear to offer a second interpretation—that Jesus' action is a "model" of humble service that his disciples are to emulate.

Adding to the complexity of the passage is the variation in the textual traditions of v. 10: some manuscripts omit "except for his feet," and others

¹ For a brief summary of the various approaches to John 13–17 within the past century, see Fernando F. Segovia, *Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition: Agapē/Agapan in I John and the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 58; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982) 82-96.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, translation, and notes* (2 vols.; AB 29–29a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970) 2. 558-62; Francis J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 1-2. For a summary of the discussions on these two views, see John C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (JSOTSup 61; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 11-17.

³ In R. Alan Culpepper's words ("The Johannine *hypodeigma*: A Reading of John 13," *Semeia* 53 [1991] 133-52, here 139), "The foot washing scene, therefore, functions metaphorically and proleptically in relation to Jesus' death."

include it even with changes in the word order.⁴ My aim in this article is to offer another way of reading this chapter within the context of the Farewell Discourse and of the Gospel as a whole. Rather than take a source-critical approach, I will use the insights of narrative criticism and a particular hermeneutical stance that I proposed in an earlier work,⁵ first to establish a structure for the chapter, then to present a narrative reading of the text, and finally to offer an interpretation.⁶

I. Structuring the Narrative

A. *The Prologue to the "Hour" (John 13:1-3)*

The initial three verses of chap. 13 are a small prologue introducing the second part of the Gospel, the "hour" of Jesus (chaps. 13–20 [21]), and, more specifically, his final meal (13:1–17:26).⁷ A number of key themes that appear in the Prologue of the Gospel (1:1–18) are repeated here: Jesus' origins and destiny are clearly stated (1:1; 13:1, 3); mention is made of his own (τὰ ἴδια, 1:11; τοὺς ἰδίους, 13:1); the world of human existence is named (κόσμος, 1:9, 10; 13:1) alongside the major adversaries, Jesus (13:1) and the devil (13:2), who were symbolized in the Prologue in the images of light and darkness (1:5). These verses, 13:1–3, are structurally united by the two references to time—"before the feast of Passover" and "during supper"—by the theme of Jesus' knowledge, and by the parallelism between v. 1 and v. 3 in the theme of Jesus' departure to the Father/God (vv. 1, 3). The unit is as follows:

1. *Before the feast of the Passover,*

Jesus, *knowing* that his hour had come to depart from this *world to the Father*, having *loved* his own, those in the *world*, *loved* them to the end.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the textual traditions and variants, see Thomas (*Footwashing*, 19–25), who draws the following conclusion: "Consequently, on the basis of early and well distributed external support and convincing internal considerations the text which includes εἰ τοὺς πόδας may be accepted as original" (p. 25). A similar conclusion is reached by Frédéric Manns ("Le Lavement des Pieds: Essai sur la structure et la signification de Jean 13," *RSR* 55 [1981] 149–69, here 162) from a study of the Jewish background to foot washing. Christoph Niemand (*Die Fusswaschungserzählung des Johannesevangeliums: Untersuchungen zu ihrer Entstehung und Überlieferung im Urchristentum* [Studia Anselmiana 114; Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1993] 196–98, 252–56) also mounts a strong argument for the longer reading based on external and internal evidence.

⁵ Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 2001).

⁶ There is no agreement on the structure of this chapter. Although my proposal has been influenced by the work of Manns ("Lavement," 159), I differ with him in separating the action of the foot washing (vv. 4–5) from the subsequent discussion and in regard to the final setting out of parallel units.

⁷ So Manns, "Lavement," 151; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 203.

2. *During the Supper,*

the devil had already made up his mind that Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, should betray him.⁸ 3. *Knowing* that everything had been given into his hands by the Father and that he came from God and was going *to God,*

The meal ends with the prayer of Jesus, which echoes these same themes and establishes chaps. 13–17 as a literary unit.⁹

O righteous *Father,* the *world* has not *known* thee, but I have *known* thee; and these *know* that thou hast sent me. I made *known* to them thy name, and I will make it *known,* that the *love* with which thou hast *loved* me may be in them and I in them. (17:25-26)

B. *The Foot Washing*

Following this “mini” prologue, the narrative proper starts with the action of Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples. This action begins the description of Jesus’ final meal and, in its symbolism, offers a theological introduction to the discussion and prayer that follow (13:6–17:26). The scene is described very sparsely in two parallel clauses:

[Jesus]

(v. 4) rose from the supper *and* laid aside his garments *and,* taking a *towel,* girded himself;

(v. 5) poured water into a bowl *and* began to wash the feet of his disciples *and* to dry them with the *towel* with which he was *girded.*

The rhythm of the two verses, each having three verbs joined by καί, and the use of διαζώννυμι to conclude both verses indicate that this is a unit, entire in itself.¹⁰ The brevity of the description of the action is not unusual in this Gospel, in which Jesus’ deeds are termed σημεῖα (2:11; 4:34) and a discourse follows the action to interpret the meaning of the σημεῖα.¹¹ This pattern continues in chap. 13, where, following the foot washing, the rest of the chapter is primarily discourse and dialogue showing a structure of reverse parallelism.

⁸ The translation of this verse will be discussed below.

⁹ Speaking of these chapters as a literary unit is not to deny the complex development of the text. This development allows the author to write an initial draft or even drafts before achieving the final form of the narrative. A recent detailed study of the possible historical development of individual units can be found in Fernando F. Segovia, *The Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) esp. 283–329. John Painter (“The Farewell Discourses and the History of Johannine Christianity,” *NTS* 27 [1981] 525–43, here 526) argues for three separate strata within the discourse material written in response to different crises faced by the community: 13:31–14:31; 15:1–16:4a; 16:4b–33. Whatever the historical origins of the material, the final form shows a unified literary structure including all of chap. 13.

¹⁰ Manns (“Lament,” 153) notes this parallelism and also that there is an *inclusio* formed by the verb νίπτω in vv. 6 and 10; but he considers vv. 4–11 to be a single unit.

¹¹ John 5 and 9 show a similar brief description of Jesus’ actions leading into a long discourse.

There are two major sections in chap. 13: vv. 6-20 and vv. 21-38; the first section moves from Peter to Judas, and the second moves in reverse from Judas to Peter. Central to both sections are Jesus' teaching and "gifts" of a model and a new commandment. The diagram below shows this structure:

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|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. Dialogue with Peter, vv. 6-11 | a'. Dialogue with Peter, vv. 36-38 |
| b. Teaching and "gift," vv. 12-15 | b'. Teaching and "gift," vv. 31-35 |
| c. The Betrayer, vv. 16-20 | c'. The Betrayer, vv. 21-30 |

Although most commentators conclude the foot washing at v. 30, following the departure of Judas, there are sound structural and thematic reasons for including vv. 31-38 within the foot-washing pericope.¹² The departure of Judas makes a break between vv. 21-30 and what follows, but this break simply concludes the unit. Judas's departure sets in motion Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, which are presented in this Gospel as the "hour" of Jesus' glorification (12:23). Judas's departure is the catalyst for Jesus' exultant cry to the Father, and it follows that Jesus' words to the Father, with their theme of glorification, are necessarily linked to Judas's betrayal.

The discussion with Peter in vv. 36-38, in which Peter queries Jesus' statement about following him, parallels the discussion in vv. 6-11, in which Peter queries Jesus' action of washing his feet. The reference to the "giving" of the commandment in v. 34 recalls the "giving" of a *ὑπόδειγμα* ("example, model") in v. 15. Manns, too, argues for the unity of the entire chapter and points to an *inclusio* formed by the use of *τίθημι* in vv. 4 and 38.¹³ These structural features situate vv. 31-38 within the foot-washing narrative as the full pericope's conclusion. Verses 31-38 look back to the foot washing, and 14:1 initiates an *inclusio* in what follows, marked by the repetition of the phrase "Let not your hearts be troubled" (14:1, 27). Even though there is no change in scene, time, or characters, 14:1 marks the beginning of a new stage in the discourse.

a, a': *Dialogue with Peter.* The emphasis in the first unit (13:6-11) is on Peter, and this is reflected in the final unit (vv. 36-38) as well. Formal aspects of the text in vv. 6-11 are repeated in vv. 36-38: "Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord'" (vv. 6, 36; cf. vv. 8, 37); "Jesus answered" (vv. 7, 36; cf. vv. 8, 38); "betray" (v. 11), "denied" (v. 38). The parallelism is shown not only in the structure of the dialogue between Jesus and Peter but also in the indications of time—"now" (*ἄρτι*, v. 7; *νῦν*, v. 36) and "later" (*μετὰ ταῦτα ὕστερον*, vv. 7, 36)—and the failure of two of the disciples, Judas and Peter (vv. 10b-11, 38b).

¹² For arguments that tie vv. 31-38 to the discourse material, see, e.g., Painter, "Farewell Discourses," 526, 529-30; Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2. 545-47; Segovia, *Love Relationships*, 136-79.

¹³ Manns, "Lavement," 151.

Table 1

6. But coming to *Simon Peter: he said to him: "Lord you wash my feet?"*

7. *Jesus answered* and said to him: "What I do you do not understand *now*, but will know *after*."

8. *Peter said to him: "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him: "Unless I wash you, you cannot have part with me."* 9. *Simon Peter said to him: "Lord not only my feet but also my hands and my head."* 10. *Jesus said to him: "Whoever has bathed has no need to wash, except for his feet, but is wholly cleansed; and you are cleansed, but not all."* 11. For he knew who was to *betray* him: on account of this that he said, "not all are cleansed."

36. *Simon Peter said to him, "Lord where are you going?"*

Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me *now*; but you shall follow *later*."

37. *Peter said to him, "Why couldn't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."* 38. *Jesus answered, "You will lay down your life for me?"*

Amen, Amen I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have *denied* me three times."

b, b': Jesus' teaching. The next sections begin with identical expressions, ὄτε οὖν (vv. 12, 31), and introduce the idea of gift giving. In vv. 12-15, Jesus speaks of *giving* (ἔδωκα) a model, and he teaches that "what I have done, you also do" (v. 15). The parallel unit of vv. 31-35 also concludes with Jesus' *giving* (δίδωμι) a new commandment, "love each other as I have loved" (v. 35). The two gifts, *model* and *commandment*, link both units, as does the rhetoric also—"as I have done (καθώς) you also do" (vv. 15, 34); "wash each other's (ἀλλήλων) feet" (v.14); "love each other" (ἀλλήλους, v. 34).

Table 2

12. *When he had washed their feet, and taken his garment and taken his place again he said to them: "Do you know what I have done to you?"*

13. You call me teacher and Master and you say rightly for so I am.

14. If I then, the Master and teacher, wash your feet, *then you ought wash each other's feet.* 15. *I gave you an example that what I have done to you, you also do."*

31. *When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is glorified the Son of Man, and God is glorified in him. 32. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify him in himself, and immediately glorify him.*

33. Little children, I am with you a little while; you will seek me but as I said to the Jews that where I go you are not able to go, now I say to you. 34. *A new commandment I give you, that you love each other as I have loved you, so also you love each other.*

35. In this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for each other."

c, c': The Betrayer. The pivotal units in each major part concentrate on Judas, the betrayer, and have solemn statements of Jesus introduced by "Amen, amen I say to you" (vv. 16, 21). The *inclusio* formed by the double "amen" and the repetition of "the one who sent" (vv. 16, 20) indicate that vv. 16-20 are a unit. Verse 30 has no double "amen," but the terse statements λαβὼν οὖν τὸ ψωμίον ἐκεῖνος ἐξήλαθεν εὐθὺς. ἦν δὲ νύξ bring to closure Jesus' words about betrayal in v. 21. In the center of both units the emphasis is on betrayal in the eating of bread (vv. 18, 26), where v. 26 fulfills the words of Ps 41:10 cited in v. 18.¹⁴

Table 3

16. "Amen, amen I say to you, the slave is not greater than his master, or the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

17. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

18. I speak not about all of you: I know whom I have chosen: but so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'One who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'

19. I say this to you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe I AM.

20. Amen, amen I say to you, whoever receives anyone whom I send receives me, and whoever receives me, receives the one who sent me."

21. After saying these things Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified and said

"Amen, amen, I say to you that one of you will betray me." 22. The disciples looked at each other puzzled about whom he spoke. 23. One of the disciples whom Jesus loved was lying close to the breast of Jesus, 24. so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Ask him about whom he speaks?" 25. So lying close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord who is it?" 26. Replying Jesus said, "It is the one to whom I give this morsel when I have dipped it." He dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas Iscariot son of Simon.

27. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do what you must quickly." 28. But no one at the table understood why he said this to him. 29. Some thought that because Judas had the common purse that Jesus had said to him, "Buy what is needed for the feast"; or to give something to the poor. 30. After taking the morsel he immediately went out. It was night.

Structurally the entire chapter can be shown thus:

¹⁴ The evangelist has altered the wording of this psalm. The LXX version (40:10) reads ὁ ἐσθίων ἄρτους μου ἐμεγάλυνεν ἐπ' ἐμὲ περνισμὸν, while the Gospel reads: 'Ὁ τρώγων μου τὸν ἄρτον ἐπήρην ἐπ' ἐμὲ τὴν πτέρναν αὐτοῦ. The Gospel's use of τρώγω reflects Jesus' earlier teaching in 6:51c-58 and therefore makes the link between the morsel and the Eucharist. On this point, see Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 20-22. Maarten J. J. Menken ("The Translation of Ps 41:10 in John 13:18," *JSNT* 40 [1990] 61-79, here 62-63) analyzes the possible sources for the Johannine version of the psalm and concludes that it is the evangelist's own translation of the MT based on Jewish exegetical methods of the time.

Prologue to the "hour": vv. 1-3

Washing of the feet: vv. 4-5

a. Dialogue with Peter: vv. 6-11

a'. Dialogue with Peter: vv. 36-38

b. Teaching and "gift": vv. 12-15

b'. Teaching and "gift": vv. 31-35

c. The betrayer: vv. 16-20

c'. The betrayer: vv. 21-30

II. A Narrative Reading of the Passage

A. *The Prologue to the "Hour"*

"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come . . ." (13:1)

Now the "hour" has come. Throughout the first part of the Gospel there have been many mentions of a future time called the "hour" (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27), which is now situated here within the context of love. As 12:27 noted, this "hour" brings to a climax the purpose of Jesus' life, which has already been described as a gift of divine love (3:16). Now the fullness of that love is to be shown.¹⁵ The Prologue to the Gospel stated, "he came to his own (εἰς τὰ ἴδια), but his own did not receive him" (1:11); now he gathers the few of "his own" (τοὺς ἰδίους) who have received him (13:1). These have been promised that they would be given the "power to become children of God" (1:12), and the mention of "his own" recalls this promise, even as the reader waits to see how the narrative will show this being accomplished. The expression "his own" with its evocation of intimacy, trust, and friendship highlights the enormity of Judas's betrayal (13:2).

Verse 2 contains two serious textual and grammatical difficulties: (1) the time of the foot washing in relation to the meal; and (2) the identity of the one in whose καρδία the treachery is conceived. The expression δείπνου γινομένου does not necessarily mean that the meal has begun, and Rudolf Bultmann translates this phrase "on the occasion of a meal."¹⁶ The meal may not yet have started, but the use of the term πάλιν ("again") in v. 12 indicates that all have taken their places at the table. If one accepts Bultmann's translation on grammatical and contextual grounds, one could place the foot washing before the beginning of the meal. This interpretation makes better cultural sense, because it was customary for guests to

¹⁵ At this point, I am giving the expression εἰς τέλος its qualitative sense. The temporal sense of the root word is most profoundly revealed in Jesus' dying word, τετέλεσται, "it is finished" (19:30). According to Culpepper ("Johannine *hypodeigma*," 136), "The *double entendre* serves the vital function of linking the footwashing to Jesus' death and interpreting Jesus' action as the culmination of his love for his own."

¹⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 465 n. 2. In this note, Bultmann discusses also the textual variant γινομένου and explains this as a later scribal error or correction; similarly, Édouard Delebecque, *Évangile de Jean: Texte traduit et annoté* (CahRB 23; Paris: Gabalda, 1987) 183.

have their feet washed prior to a meal (cf. Luke 7:44); and I will argue that this timing accords with the Gospel's christology.

R. Alan Culpepper recognizes in this verse a Semitic idiom; he translates, "The devil had already made up his mind that Judas should betray him."¹⁷ Culpepper's rendering makes clear that it is the καρδία of the devil, not Judas, that is the object of βάλλω εἰς. This reading also makes sense of v. 27, which reports that Satan entered into Judas "after the morsel." The lapse in time between Satan's decision (v. 2) and his action (v. 27) indicates that Satan's power has been undermined. It is the word of Jesus (vv. 21-26), not the decision of Satan, that instigates Judas's departure (v. 30). Satan may appear to be the "ruler of this world" (12:31; 16:11), but, with the arrival of Jesus' "hour," judgment has already been passed.¹⁸ Delebecque recalls that a compound of this same verb (ἐκβάλλω) was used in 12:31 to announce the ultimate outcome of Jesus' "hour" in the judgment passed on "the ruler of this world."¹⁹ It follows that the use of βάλλω in 13:2 referring to a decision of the devil may be read as high irony. Furthermore, Culpepper's translation sets up the contrast between the mind of Jesus (v. 1) and the mind of the devil (v. 2).

B. The Foot Washing

In his full awareness of the "hour" (v. 1), Jesus acts with a solemn and deliberative gesture toward the disciples who have spent time with him. Laying aside his clothes (τίθησιν) and girding himself with a towel, he washes the feet of the disciples; and the description of his "laying aside" and later "taking up" (ἔλαβεν) his garments recalls the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, who is able to "lay aside" (10:11, 15, 17, 18) and "take up" his life (10:17, 18). Sandra Schneiders comments, "Jesus is presented as acting in full awareness of his origin and destination, i.e., of his identity and mission as agent of God's salvific will and work in the world (13:1, 3). The introduction, therefore, makes it clear that what follows is not simply a good example in humility but a prophetic action."²⁰

Foot washing in the NT culture was performed on occasions such as "(1) cultic settings, (2) domestic settings for personal hygiene and comfort, and (3) domestic settings devoted to hospitality."²¹ According to Manns, foot washing had particular significance in the synagogue, where it recalled God's apparition to

¹⁷ Culpepper, "Johannine hypodeigma," 136; also Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 13 n. 39. For a discussion of this grammatical form and its background in Hellenistic Greek, see Delebecque (*Évangile de Jean*, 183), who states emphatically: "le cœur n'est pas celui de Judas, mais du diable."

¹⁸ Note the use of the perfect κέκριται in 16:11.

¹⁹ Delebecque, *Évangile de Jean*, 183.

²⁰ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Foot Washing (John 13:1-20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 76-92, here 81. The interpretation of this prophetic action will follow below.

²¹ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 27; so also Arland J. Hultgren, "The Johannine Footwashing (13.1-11) as Symbol of Eschatological Hospitality," *NTS* 28 (1982) 539-46, here 541.

Abraham under the oaks of Mamre.²² In Gen 18:4, the MT reads, “Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.” The rendering of this verse in *Targum Neofiti* is significantly different; here Abraham says, “I will go and get some water in order to wash your feet.” In this version Abraham, as the host, washes the feet of the travelers. The context of the scene in *Neofiti* may have something to do with Passover, since Sarah is told to make *unleavened* bread. Abraham’s role in washing the feet of the divine messenger is brought out also in the *Testament of Abraham*: “Then Abraham went forward and washed the feet of the commander-in-chief, Michael. Abraham’s heart was moved and he wept over the stranger” (*T. Abr.* 2.9).²³ In his act of personally washing the feet of his guests, Abraham is established in the Jewish tradition as the great model of hospitality.²⁴

a. Dialogue with Peter. The meaning of this action is not clear to the disciples, and Peter’s words could well voice the discomfort of the entire group, “Lord, you wash my feet?” Peter’s difficulty is not with having his feet washed *per se*, but with having them washed by Jesus. Peter perceives this as a degrading act for Jesus to perform, for it was customary in Peter’s society that a slave would bring a bowl of water and a person would wash his/her own feet.²⁵ This, however, is Peter’s perception, not necessarily the perception of Jesus. The Fourth Evangelist frequently uses misunderstanding as a literary device, so Peter’s view of the foot washing may be an instance of such misunderstanding. Jesus even states that this action will not be understood until a “later” time (v. 7).

The terminology of “now” and “later” requires an understanding of John’s use of time as a tool in the development of his hermeneutical perspective. “Now” and “later” in this Gospel are not simply references to time in a neutral sense; these terms have a rich theological purpose. On several occasions in the narrative thus far, there have been indicators that the full understanding of their experience is not accessible to the participants in the story but will be known only after Jesus’ death and resurrection. “When therefore he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (2:22). The disciples did not understand at first, but after Jesus was glorified, they remembered what had been written in the Scriptures and what had been done to Jesus (12:16; cf. 20:9). In both cases understanding occurs

²² Manns, “Lavement,” 160.

²³ Although the targumic evidence may not be conclusive because of difficulties in dating, evidence of this tradition is found in *Testament of Abraham* (dated 75–125 C.E.; see *OTP*, 1, 875), thus in a Jewish pseudepigraphon contemporary with the Johannine community.

²⁴ J. T. Fitzgerald, “Hospitality,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000) 522–25, here 522.

²⁵ In the scriptural instances, a person usually washes his/her own feet, whereas in the Greco-Roman world this act of washing would be done by a slave. See Thomas, *Footwashing*, 35–42, 46–56.

as a recollection, a remembering; and both cases also involve the Scriptures. This retrospective understanding is seen as a particular function of the Paraclete, who will “teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:26). It is only in the “later” post-Easter time, when the community has the gift of the Paraclete, that the fullness of understanding would be possible. This is a unique Johannine understanding of revelation, and it means that the post-Easter disciples (i.e., the Johannine community) continue to experience, in the Spirit, a revelation that the first disciples experienced in the person of Jesus. In fact, the post-Easter disciples can have access to even greater understanding than those first disciples. Jean Zumstein comments, “The Paraclete is the memory of Jesus grasped at the point of its fruition, the Easter retrospect upon the incarnate Christ.”²⁶ In this pericope, the disciples will grasp the meaning of Jesus’ act of foot washing only after his death.

In response to Peter’s objection, Jesus begins to unfold the meaning *he* gives to this action. “Unless I wash you, you can have no part with me” (13:8). The term used here, μέροϛ, implies the sense of “share in my inheritance,” “participate with me in” or “be drawn into my destiny.”²⁷ Foot washing is an invitation to the disciples to become participants with Jesus in his “hour.” As he, with deliberate foreknowledge, moves from this world to the Father, they too are to be involved. That the term μέροϛ involves Jesus’ future death, which in this chapter is presented as his departure to the Father (v. 1), is born out in the parallel section. Jesus says to Peter, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow after” (v. 36). The “now” is the “hour” of Jesus, but by having a part/μέροϛ with him, disciples will follow him “later,” even a disciple who denies him (v. 38).

b. Teaching and “Gift”. The next unit (13:12-15) adds to the deeper understanding of the meaning of Jesus’ action. Jesus instructs the disciples that they too should wash each other’s feet, that what he has done is a “model”—though what he means by this is not yet clear. In his discussion of the term ὑπόδειγμα, Culpepper cites a number of passages in Jewish literature where the word is used “to exhort the faithful to mark an exemplary death” (2 Macc 6:28, 31; 4 Macc 17:23; Sir 44:16).²⁸ Although an exemplary death is not the only sense of the term, there are indicators in the Johannine text that this meaning must be considered in the context of the foot washing. The opening verse of the chapter sets the scene at the “hour” of Jesus’ departure to the Father. Jesus’ action in laying aside (v. 4) and taking up (v. 12) his garments symbolically expresses his identity as the

²⁶ “Der Paraklet ist die im Vollzug begriffene Anamnese Jesu, die österliche Retrospektion des inkarnierten Christus” (Jean Zumstein, “Der Prozess der Relecture in der johanneischen Literatur,” *NTS* 42 [1996] 394-411, here 410).

²⁷ Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2. 565.

²⁸ See Culpepper, “Johannine *hypodeigma*,” 142-43; also Heinrich Schlier, “*hypodeigma*,” *TDNT*, 2. 32-33.

Good Shepherd who can lay down (10:11, 15, 17, 18) and take up (10:17, 18) his life. Jesus' appearance, girded with a towel, indicating a role reversal from master to slave, suggests that the model is only that of humble service; but the solemnity of the occasion, together with Jesus' words to Peter about having a "part with him" and the term ὑπόδειγμα, suggests a deeper meaning related to the cross. Here again, it is important to take seriously Jesus' words to Peter, "What I do you do not understand now, but you will know later" (13:7). It is still too soon to grasp the meaning of Jesus' actions.

In the parallel unit (13:31-35), Jesus calls his disciples "little children" (v. 33), which recalls both the promise that those who receive the incarnate Word will become "children of God" (1:12) and the characterization of Jesus' task as gathering God's "scattered children" (11:52). In this unit, Jesus gives a new commandment to these little children to love one another as he has loved. The two instructions featuring the verb δίδωμι, 13:15, 34, reciprocally interpret each other through their parallelism.²⁹ The action of Jesus in washing the feet of the disciples can now be seen as a model of loving "as I have loved." In both segments of these parallel statements, Jesus is the model or standard he proposes to his disciples: wash each other's feet as I have done, love each other as I have loved. Read this way, the foot washing is an expression of love rather than just a good example of humble service. To the observer, it may appear to be service, as it did to Peter, but in the experience of the one doing the deed, it is love.³⁰ Furthermore, the placement of these two gifts highlights the extraordinary depths of Jesus' love. In the structure I propose, the two units (vv. 12-15 and 31-35), in which Jesus speaks of his actions in terms of a gift, are framed by a description of two of "his own" who receive these gifts: Peter, who will deny him (vv. 6-11, 36-38), and Judas, who will betray him (vv. 16-20, 21-30). Truly, here is love displayed εἰς τέλος, where love is given in the knowledge that those who receive it will fail. Such love is utterly gratuitous, given unreservedly—which shows that the dynamism of this love lies solely with the lover.³¹ "It is precisely in his unconditional gift of himself to people who do not love him that Jesus reveals who he is and what he is doing.

²⁹ Although he presents a different structure, Yves Simoens (*La gloire d'aimer: Structures stylistiques et interprétatives dans le discours de la Cène [Jn 13-17]* [AnBib 90; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981] 92) also emphasizes the parallelism of these two gifts and the importance of relating them to each other in the process of their interpretation.

³⁰ Schneiders's work (see "Foot Washing," 81-86) on "a phenomenology of service" has been particularly helpful in sharpening my interpretation of this text. She describes three models: (1) service between unequals, where one party has some rights over the other; (2) service given to another to meet some need within the one serving (even if this is an unconscious need); and (3) service between friends.

³¹ Francis J. Moloney ("A Sacramental Reading of John 13:1-38," *CBQ* 53 [1991] 237-56, here 249 n. 4) develops the three models of service proposed by Schneiders and suggests a fourth model: "a love unto death of friends who have betrayed and denied the one who loves still."

... Revealed here is God's love which transcends and challenges all human criteria and human experience."³²

c. *The Betrayer.* The pivotal units express the enormity of Judas's deed. Middle Eastern hospitality would require that even your enemy, if he has broken bread with you, should be safe within your home.³³ To turn against one who has welcomed you and given you bread to eat is the height of betrayal. The words of Psalm 41 are fulfilled when Judas receives from Jesus the morsel of bread.³⁴ Judas is now aligned with Satan, and the powers of darkness close in. He leaves the presence of Jesus, the light of the world (8:12; 9:5), and goes out into the night (13:30). In terms of Middle Eastern hospitality, Judas leaves the meal as Jesus' enemy.³⁵

III. Interpreting the Foot Washing as Welcome into God's Household

At this point, I move from the *now* of the narrative time to the *later* of the post-Easter community and the time when Jesus promised that the disciples would understand the meaning of his action. Between *now* and *later*, the events of the "hour" intervene. Jesus completes his Passover to the Father and, in this moment, draws his disciples into his own filiation, fulfilling the promise of the Prologue that believers would become children of God (1:12). From the cross, the Nazarene temple builder raises up a new house(hold) of God in the new relationships formed between the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple (19:25-28).³⁶ David Aune proposes that, at some point, being part of "the household of God" must have been both the experience and the self-image of the Johannine community;³⁷ and the Gospel narrative suggests that this insight is correct. From the first eighteen verses, the Evangelist begins to develop a metaphorical framework based on the Middle Eastern social structure of the "household." The relationship between Jesus and

³² Ibid., 249.

³³ Bruce J. Malina, "The Received View and What It Cannot Do: III John and Hospitality," *Semeia* 35 (1986) 171-89, here 185. Malina comments, "Frequently the ritual of footwashing marks the movement from stranger to guest (see Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32)" (p. 183).

³⁴ See n. 14 above on the eucharistic implications of the morsel. The term ψωμίον need not necessarily mean bread; it could also be a morsel of meat. However, given the link with Ps 41:10 and the use of τρώγω, with cross-reference to the discourse on the "Bread of Life" in 6:51c-58, ψωμίον is best understood as a morsel of bread.

³⁵ "The stranger-guest will leave the host either as friend or enemy" (Malina, "Received View," 186).

³⁶ The role of Jesus as the builder of the new temple is developed in my earlier work, *God Dwells with Us*; on the Nazarene and the scene in 19:25-28, see pp. 171-74, 186-90.

³⁷ According to David E. Aune (*The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity* [NovTSup 28; Leiden: Brill, 1972] 130), "It is probable that in John 14:2 (and also 8:35) the term οἰκία (τοῦ πατρὸς) reflects the self-designation of the Johannine community."

God is described as “father–son” (1:18), and believers are told that they will become “children” who will be “born of God” (1:13). This familial imagery continues throughout the Gospel.³⁸ In his work on metaphor in John, Jan van der Watt uses the expression “*Family of the King*”;³⁹ I propose that the term *household* more accurately expresses the Johannine theology within its cultural context. Carolyn Osiek rightly points out that our experience of a nuclear family was not the experience in the biblical world; indeed, the Bible does not even have a word for family.⁴⁰ The closest expression in the MT to what we understand as family, is בית אב (“father’s house”) or, in the LXX, οἶκος τοῦ πατρῶς. This terminology is culturally more accurate and is also found twice in the Fourth Gospel (2:16; 14:2); I would therefore substitute “household” for “family” in van der Watt’s proposal. From the vantage point of the community’s self-perception as “the household of God” and of the new insight into Jesus’ mission to reveal and make possible this household, the meaning of the narrative of the foot washing for the community emerges. For the disciples, foot washing is a proleptic experience of the welcome into the Father’s household that will be accomplished at the cross.⁴¹

The parallelism between the two units (vv. 12-15 and vv. 31-35) brings together the foot washing, interpreted as a model, and the command that disciples love one another as Jesus has loved [them]. Jesus’ love is demonstrated by the laying down of his life (15:13), which, I have argued, the foot washing symbolically enacts. Those having a part (μέρος) in Jesus and drawn into the household of his Father (14:2) will pattern their lives on Jesus’ love, since loving after this pattern is what constitutes relationships within the household (15:9, 10). The foot washing in its entirety (vv. 3-38) may be described as a Johannine σημεῖον, which the rest of the Farewell Discourse will interpret.

These final chapters (13–17), leading into Jesus’ passion, have the rhythm of a dinner with invited guests. Rather than present a detailed literary analysis of their structure here, I propose a simpler format in five phases:⁴²

³⁸ Klaus Scholtissek (*In Ihm sein und bleiben: Die Sprache der Immanenz in den johanneischen Schriften* [Herders biblische Studien 21; Freiburg: Herder, 2000] 249, 267) calls this “family-metaphor” the semantic axis of the Gospel, presented first in 1:11-13 and returning in this image of the Father’s *Hausgemeinschaft*.

³⁹ Jan G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (Biblical Interpretation Series 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁴⁰ Caroline Osiek, “The Family in Early Christianity: ‘Family Values’ Revisited,” *CBQ* 58 (1996) 1-24, here 10-11. Similarly, Halvor Moxnes, “What Is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families,” in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997) 13-41.

⁴¹ Anticipating the formation of the Father’s household, the disciples are called “children” during this meal (13:33).

⁴² A formal literary structure can be found in a number of commentaries; see, e.g., Simoons, *La gloire d’aimer*, 52-76, with summary, p. 77.

Phase 1: 13:1-3. Jesus gathers “his own” for a final meal.

Phase 2: 13:4-11. He washes their feet to welcome them into the household that his departure will form, namely, “my Father’s house” (see 14:2).⁴³

Phase 3: 13:12-38. The disciples, including Judas, share food, and Jesus gives these “little children” experience of the Father’s household through the requirement to love.

Phase 4: chaps. 14-16. As the meal progresses, Jesus offers final teaching and explains the meaning his death will have for the disciples.

Phase 5: chap. 17. At the end of the meal, Jesus prays that disciples may share in the union between Father and Son (17:21-23).

According to Dennis E. Smith and Shemuel Safrai, there are various features of this Johannine meal that are typical of the tradition of the Greco-Roman banquet/symposium.⁴⁴ Guests would come to the home; their feet would be washed; they would partake in a meal; there would be discussion; and finally, the host would conclude the meal with a hymn or a prayer. In the OT, too, the most frequent occasion for foot washing, apart from cultic cleansings, is to welcome guests. “A common greeting in ancient Israel is to offer water to a guest and to invite him to wash his feet (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judg 19:21; 1 Sam 25:41; cf. 2 Sam 11:8) and to rest (Gen 18:4), spend the night (Gen 19:2) or accept food (Gen 24:32-33; Judg 19:21).”⁴⁵ Although phase 3, the actual meal, is given only brief attention in John’s narrative, it nevertheless remains a significant backdrop to the discussions: it is designated as the overarching context of what follows (v. 2); mention is made of dipping a morsel, probably bread (v. 26); and the beloved disciple is described as “reclining” close to the breast of Jesus (v. 23), which

⁴³ Niemand (*Fusswaschungserzählung*, 404-11) takes a similar approach, suggesting that the historical situation that gave rise to the need for a foot-washing ritual within the Johannine community was the need to initiate and welcome the disciples of John the Baptist, who had already undergone baptism.

⁴⁴ Shemuel Safrai (“Religion in Everyday Life,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* [ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976] 793-833) describes the following stages for the usual evening meal: ablutions, a blessing, the breaking of bread (“bread” standing for the whole meal), and a grace or blessing following the meal. He notes that some groups would meet for a communal meal with a discussion or lecture from their teacher. Among the elements noted by Dennis E. Smith (*From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003] 222), the following apply to John 13: reclining at table (v. 23), washing the feet prior to reclining (v. 5), ranking at table (v. 23), discourse on an appropriate theme (chaps. 14-16), and ending the meal with a hymn (chap. 17). Elsewhere (p. 153), Smith refers to a prayer at the conclusion of the meals at Qumran. See also Blake Leyerle, “Meal Customs in the Greco-Roman World,” in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffmann; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) 29-61.

⁴⁵ Hultgren, “Johannine Footwashing,” 541. Hultgren also notes that the verb *ὑπάρχειν* (John 13:5, 7, 8, 10) is the same verb that is used to translate these examples of foot washing in the LXX.

indicates the posture of one dining at a table. John's major interest is in Jesus' teaching, phase 4 (chaps. 14–16), and in his prayer at the conclusion of the meal (chap. 17).⁴⁶

The five phases listed above, which are typical components of the first-century meal, allow the foot washing to be seen for what it is—a gesture of welcome into “my Father's house(hold)” (14:2).⁴⁷ Jesus, as the Son who knows intimately the Father's heart, is able to make this gesture of welcome on his Father's behalf. For commentators who come from a Western background, as I do, foot washing is not a common experience, but it is still such in many Middle Eastern societies,⁴⁸ where it is understood primarily as an act of welcome. Although it is unusual for the host to perform this deed, the biblical tradition of Abraham's welcome to his guests emphasizes hospitality rather than humility. The primary perception of this act as a gesture of welcome would be taken for granted, even though, within narrative time, questions would still remain.⁴⁹ Welcome to what? Why is Jesus performing this action? What do his words mean?

From a post-Easter perspective, it becomes clear what Jesus meant when he indicated that this act of hospitality was needed if disciples were to have a part (μέρος) in what he was doing in his return to the Father. I have argued elsewhere that Jesus from his cross forms the “household of God,” which is represented there by the presence of his mother and the beloved disciple (19:25b–27).⁵⁰ In the new relationships Jesus establishes in this moment, believers are drawn into his divine filiation and become children of God (cf. 1:12). The gesture of welcome in the washing of feet points ahead, in John's understanding, to the crucifixion as

⁴⁶ Recent commentators have appealed to the genre of a “farewell speech” or “testament” as the likely model that has been used in shaping these chapters. For a summary of this approach, see Francis J. Moloney, *John* (SacPag 4; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1998) 376–78.

⁴⁷ Hultgren (“Johannine Footwashing,” 542–43) comes to the same conclusion based on the normal use of foot washing in the OT. My work on the meaning of “my Father's house” (John 14:2) develops this insight further by showing how the narrative bears this out; see Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 160–64, 171–74, 185–90.

⁴⁸ Hultgren (“Johannine Footwashing,” 546 n. 28) points out that foot washing as an act of hospitality has continued up to modern times in some cultures.

⁴⁹ Using a very different methodology, Niemand (*Fusswaschungserzählung*) comes to the same conclusion about the meaning of the foot washing. He proposes that the *Sitz im Leben* for this passage lies in the problem surrounding the disciples of John the Baptist and how these disciples were to be received into the Johannine community. They had already received John's baptism of purification and so did not need a second baptism; but they did need a ritual or initiation to draw them into the Christian community (p. 383). For these former disciples of the Baptist, “die Fusswaschung . . . ihren Konnotationen gemäss, für Wertschätzung und Aufnahme in Haus und Gemeinschaft der Gemeinde steht und zudem den Aspekt des Freuden- und Hochzeitsmahles evoziert” (p. 384; emphasis his). Foot washing was thus a welcoming ceremony.

⁵⁰ Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 185–90.

the creation of God's household.⁵¹ The very ordinary deed of foot washing is therefore a profound Johannine σημεῖον.⁵²

IV. Conclusion

In laying aside his garments and donning the garb of a household servant, Jesus demonstrates the essential relationships within God's "household." There may be differences in roles and tasks, but there is an equality made possible by love. The example Jesus gives is not of servitude but of the depths of his love (13:1) and of God's love for us (3:16). The Fourth Gospel does not present Jesus as the "Servant of God," as do the Synoptics; Jesus is rather the Shepherd-King who freely lays down his life for love of his friends (15:13). To the outside observer, love may appear to be lowly service, as it can also seem to be duty; but the experience of love transcends and transforms service and duty.⁵³ This is why the attitude of love among disciples is so critical, for love is the essential dynamism of any household. At one level, Jesus' relationship with his disciples remains that of teacher and master, but as the "hour" approaches, there is a deeper level of loving intimacy that he now reveals, knowing that it will not be understood until *later*.

As the Prologue announced, Johannine christology is incarnational (1:14), making possible the transformation of humanity into "children of God" (1:12). As Jesus gathers his own, the process of his "hour" begins, and Jesus enacts a loving welcome into the Father's household with the simple, homely implements of a towel, a basin, and water.

⁵¹ In his examination of the language of "immanence" in John, Scholtissek (*In Ihm sein und bleiben*, 374) reaches a similar conclusion. "Diese nachösterliche Glaubenserfahrung lotet Joh 14 haus- und familienmetaphorisch aus. Das Wohnen in der Hausgemeinschaft Gottes, zu der der Auferstandene die Seinen 'aufzunehmen' verheisst (14,3), wird den Liebenden durch das Kommen und Wohnungnehmen von Vater und Sohn bei den Glaubenden auch schon vor der Vollendung zuteil" (emphasis his).

⁵² On the appropriateness of calling the foot washing a Johannine σημεῖον, see Schneiders, "Foot Washing," 80; also James D. G. Dunn, "The Washing of the Disciples' Feet in John 13:1-20," *ZNW* 61 (1970) 247-52, here 248.

⁵³ "By the foot washing Jesus has transcended and transformed the only ontologically based inequality among human beings, that between him and us" (Schneiders, "Foot Washing," 87).



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