Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Bart Roush
October 4, 2026
John 13:12–17; 34–35, 1 Peter 4:8–11

Let us pray for an awareness of and inspiration from God's Spirit.

God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out upon us the Spirit of Wisdom and understanding that, being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be opened to know the things that pertain to life and holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

John 13:12–17: 34–35

> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? **13**You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. **14**So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15**For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. **16**Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. **17** If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.
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> **34**I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. **35**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

1 Peter 4:8-11

> Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. [9]Be hospitable to one another without complaining. [10]Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. [11]Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

For the last couple of weeks in the Sunday adult faith formation, we have discussed public ministry and the example of Jesus. During the discussion I mentioned that I am always a little disappointed whenever I overhear a conversation about the purpose or the reason Christian people give when they are asked why they participate in service to others or do good deeds, and the person responds with, "because it was the right thing to do." And while that is correct, those things are "the right thing to do," I don't believe it is the primary reason we are to do acts of service, work to overturn injustice, and participate in good deeds. The primary reason to do so is because we are following the example of Jesus, and because this is what God has created the church to do.

As I mentioned last week, we begin a time this month to focus a little during worship on financial stewardship in a specific sense, but also the purpose of church in a larger sense. In this financial stewardship season, we ask everyone to consider prayerfully what they feel called to give in the next year as a faithful response to the generosity of God. This is not something that should be done from compulsion, or begrudgingly, but rather from a sense of gratitude and generosity. It is a personal decision, and one that can only be determined by you. Our theme for this year's

stewardship season is “Together We Serve.” We chose this theme because it highlights at least two things. The first is that we do church together. We are individuals, but also members of the Body of Christ. Church is only church because we are with other people. We cannot be the church on our own. Secondly, the theme highlights that we are called to lives of service. That the very purpose for the church is to be in service, in God’s name, for the benefit of others. Over the course of the next few weeks, we will highlight our ability to serve, pray, care for one another because we are the Body of Christ. We are better together. And how we do things together is important.

The scripture from the Gospel of John is most frequently heard during Holy Week on Maundy Thursday. The word Maundy is derived from Latin for command or mandate. Maundy Thursday marks the occasion when Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and gives them a new commandment to love one another as Jesus loves.

I was struck this week by the fact that Jesus says that he is giving the disciples a “new” commandment. Surely to show love is not a new thing. The disciples have already heard Jesus teach that distillation of the most important things is to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. How, then, is this a new commandment. This question led me down a little bit of a theological rabbit hole, and there doesn’t seem to be a consensus, but I did find some compelling arguments.

One argument was that while the idea of love is not new, the quality of that love is what is new. When Jesus is asked what the most important law is, he tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and he adds a second to love our neighbor as ourselves. When he says this, Jesus is quoting the Hebrew scriptures. To love God and our neighbors as ourselves is not new. A common interpretation from Rabbinic tradition is that the law in Leviticus that says we should “love our

neighbors as ourselves," may have been an instruction to love our neighbors *not more* than ourselves. That is, in some circumstances, it is taught that your own life takes precedence over the life of the other. However, what Jesus says when he gives the commandment to the disciples to love one another, is that they are to love one another, "just as I have loved you." This, I think, is a new standard for what love looks like and how far love extends. No more are we to love others as we love ourselves, instead we are called to love the way Jesus loved.

Now, before we all get really nervous – we know none of us can achieve the standard of Jesus – which is why there is always, always, grace. None of us will ever be able to love completely in the way that Jesus loved, and God knows this. But Jesus is our model and we seek to follow as close as possible. Jesus sets himself as the standard. Prior to issuing the new commandment, Jesus has done the unexpected by washing the feet of his disciples. He has taught them that to follow him is to be a servant. Jesus chooses to serve rather than be served. When Jesus tells the disciples to love as he has loved, he demonstrates that the direction of the love is toward others in service. Love is not a new command, but how we love is.

Jesus goes further and says that how we love in the world is how people will know we follow Jesus. If we demonstrate our love, and specifically a love in service directed toward others, that is how people will know we are disciples of Jesus. They will not know because of our accomplishments, or theological statements or arguments, but people will know we follow Jesus because of our actions and how we treat and love others. Now, don't hear me wrong, I think it is still very important how we talk about our faith, and that we do so publicly, and that we are able to articulate the motivations behind our actions. As I said earlier, I think there is a more complete response when someone asks us why we do what we do than, "because it is the right thing to do." When we talk

about why we do what we do, we should be able to articulate the motivating force as the love we have in Jesus and the command to follow Jesus as an example of that love. So, words and actions are both important, and they should be aligned and they should demonstrate as close as possible the example and model we see in Jesus.

And not only are we to understand Jesus as the model, but the scripture also tells us that when we are able to love as Jesus, we do so as ambassadors of God. In his letter to the churches in Asia Minor, Peter tells them that when they serve others, they are doing so with the gifts that God has given them as if they are speaking with God's words and with the strength that God supplies. This is true not because the one serving is to be honored, but rather, it is so God may be glorified in those words and actions. Again, the focus on the service is for the benefit of others and to the glory of God.

I mentioned last week that scripture articulates servant leadership that these passages are describing, and I mentioned several attributes of what servanthood looks like, and I want to briefly state them again for us this week because I don't think we can be reminded enough about the type of love that Jesus is calling us toward.

First, servanthood means that you serve from a place of fullness. Servants who allow God to fill their cup are free to be used for God's purposes. They are secure, solid, and healthy enough to align with purposes that are bigger than themselves. They can confidently pursue their mission in life and perform those good works God would have them do for the kin-dom of God.

Similarly, a second principle of scriptural servanthood is that servants ensure their own needs are met so they can freely focus on the needs of others. Rest, recreation, and renewing your relationship with God are vital. Taking time to make sure your own emotional, physical, and

spiritual needs are met ensures that you are able to serve from a place of fullness.

Another principle of biblical servanthood is that when we open our hearts to God's purposes, we become available to move to the places where God wants us to be. The Bible is filled with examples of God calling ordinary people to extraordinary circumstances or calling people to tasks and paths for which they didn't think they were adequate. The more we are open to God, the more we will be able to go where God would have us serve, even to places we may not expect.

A fourth principle is that following God's leading does not always result in the world's approval or align with what society values. How the world measure success and fulfillment is different than the way in which God measures success and fulfillment.

A fifth principle of servanthood in scripture is that finding ways to use your giftedness in service to God and others is a choice. It's in your hands whether you serve or not. And this is where understanding the nature of God-given gifts is important. Not everyone can or should do everything. Part of our jobs as servants of God is to discover our gifts and then figure our how best to use them in service to others. There are specific gifts and skills that God has given each of us for the benefit of the world.

I want to highlight one such way we as a church are giving of our gifts and serving the world that is having a real impact in the world for the benefit of others. Some of you are probably aware of the organization known as Kiva. Kiva is a non-profit that specializes in providing micro-loans across the globe, small amounts that make a huge impact. There are over one billion people who are unbanked in the world. That means that over a billion people do not have access to checking accounts or

credit or debit cards for easy access to money and have no credit history. They are unable to receive loans from a traditional bank.

Kiva was formed in 2005 and started by offering a $500 loan to a woman named Elizabeth in Uganda. She used that money to expand her fish mongering business, and that small amount of money was enough to change her life for the better. Kiva asks donors to supply funds, and then Kiva works with local microfinance institutions to supply loans to entrepreneurs. People are able to donate as little as twenty-five dollars, and they can search on projects and persons that are applying for the loan. Once enough donors have given small amounts to equal the requested amount, the loan is distributed to the entrepreneur. The borrower then is able to start their project and they begin to repay the loan. As the loan is repaid, the initial donor receives their donation back and they are able to re-lend the money to another entrepreneur and the cycle continues. Kiva borrowers have a repayment rate of over 96%, so very few loans go into default. Together, all of these micro donations turn into micro loans that change the world. By acting together, small changes occur and it means someone is able to better sustain their life and their family. It means access to steady income, clean water, sending their kids to school, adequate shelter. It particularly has a positive impact on some of the most vulnerable among us. Since it's founding Kiva has funded almost 3 million loans that total 2.4 billion dollars and impacted over 6 million people.

For the last 11 years, Oak Grove Presbyterian Church has participated in providing loans to Kiva participants. Over the course of those 11 years, we have helped fund 323 loans, an average of 30 loans per year. As of this month, through our initial donation to now, and by re-loaning the money as it has been paid back, Oak Grove has given loans totaling $80,260. In the last year, we have been in the top 1% of lenders to Kiva.

We have made loans around the globe and for a variety of projects. This month we gave loans to help support 3 women to purchase solar kits that mitigates the cost of rising fossil fuel prices. Loans that we have supported have provided feed for livestock and poultry to increase production, purchased sheep, construction material, thread, beans, rice, hay, and a freezer, just to name a few things. We have supported loans in the United States in places like California, Pennsylvania, and Seattle. Around the world, we have supported loans in Guatemala, Fiji, the Philippines, Uganda, Mongolia, Ecuador, Senegal, Kenya, Madagascar, Tonga, Columbia, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, and Zambia, again, just to name a few places. If you want to learn more about Kiva, I invite you to talk to Gar Nordin, who for the last several years has managed Oak Grove's Kiva account. And thank you Gar for your diligence and faithful stewardship!

As I mentioned this week, and as we see in today's reading as well, we are created to serve God and to love others following the example of Jesus. We do not do this work alone, but we do it together, and because we do it together, the we, and the world are better for it.

Amen.