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January 12th, 2025

Scripture: John 13: 1-15

Sermon Title: Jesus Our Lord

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today I am beginning a new sermon series focusing on our ***Images of Jesus***. As followers of Christ in 2025, it is a good time to revisit how we image and characterize Jesus. What names do we give Jesus to describe our relationship with him? We will look at the idea of Jesus as our Lord today. In future weeks we will explore Jesus as our peacemaker, friend, healer, and Savior. Next week will be different because we will have guest preacher Taliilee Fiqruu share about her mission work, but she will also naturally highlight the role Jesus has in her life and ministry.

So let us begin to reflect together on Jesus as Our Lord. Jesus as Lord is a common way to relate to Jesus for most Christians. I grew up referring to Jesus as Lord quite often. To me calling Jesus Lord

meant he was the one in charge. He was God, the one who is Sovereign over my life. I did not think much more about the idea of Lord, since it was just a normal term that referred to Jesus. In other countries Lord may refer to a position in society, but in the United States the only Lord I heard of growing up referred to Jesus.

As I got into college and later seminary and learned more about the term Lord historically and within Scripture, I realized that calling Jesus Lord is actually a more subversive thing to do given how this term was used during the days of Jesus within the Greco Roman World.

Mark E. Moore, who is both a pastor and professor, writes about how Jesus is Lord was a subversive title in the Greco-Roman world in which Jesus lived in the first century. In an article about this topic, Moore explains,

“Against the backdrop of Greco-Roman politics and religion, saying “Jesus is Lord” was a dangerous declaration of his hegemony over

other earthly rulers. Furthermore, after his ascension, his rule extended to heaven and earth. No wonder the contemporary culture balked at such an assertion.

When the early Christians boldly proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord,” they pitted Jesus against both local leaders and literary legends. In a society where Caesar was Lord, this seemingly foolhardy assertion was a perilous move that could be understood as fomenting rebellion. And where Zeus was Lord, it could be interpreted as blasphemy.

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Thus, this subversive claim upset the established social and religious order of Romans as well as Jews. Just so we are clear, Christians didn’t add Jesus to the list of leaders, human and divine, who were also Lord. He replaced them. “Jesus is Lord” excluded all

other claimants, putting Jesus on a pedestal that reached the very throne of God. In this article Moore then quotes Philippians 2:9-11...

“As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

Moore continues...

The renowned Roman historian Tacitus described how Christians who refused to proclaim “Caesar is Lord” were subjected to cruel punishment (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44). Their declaration raised questions and heated the political debate by challenging the implicit social norm. Their statement “Jesus is Lord” raised both eyebrows and ire.

To make matters more complicated, this claim, applied to Jesus, challenged what it meant to be a “Lord.” Jesus embodied a kind of lordship in stark contrast to the gods of Olympus, one marked by humility, service, and self-sacrificing love rather than ostentation or caprice. This new interpretation of power and authority, based on the life and teachings of Jesus, established a new standard that has been echoed throughout history.”

I think this helpful summary by Mark E. Moore of the historical context from which Jesus was called Lord prepares us well to now look at our Scripture text today.

The Lord we follow, “Jesus Our Lord” is a different kind of Lord.

Unlike Caesar and other Roman leaders who identified themselves as Lord and Divine out of personal pride, Jesus is the Lord who humbles himself and washes the disciples’ feet.

Imagine the scene of Jesus with his disciples in our story today. It is the last supper. Jesus knows he will soon be facing the cross. During

the supper, knowing that he had come from God and was going to God, Jesus gets up, takes off his outer robe and ties a towel around his waste. He pours water into a basin and starts to wash the disciples feet and then wipe them with the towel. The part in the story that speaks to me the most is when he gets to Simon Peter. Peter asks, "Lord are you going to wash my feet?" Notice Peter calls him Lord. He does not think it is appropriate for Jesus to wash his feet since he is the Lord. Simon Peter understood that washing feet was normally a role for servants not befitting a rabbi or in Jesus' case the Lord of Lords. But Jesus shows he is a humble Lord, the Servant Lord, who is not only willing to wash Simon Peter's feet, but desires to show this type of love to Peter. Peter like many of us who are offered love from Jesus, struggles to receive it. Peter says, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus explains if you want to share in my life, you must let me wash your feet. Peter wakes up and says, in that case please do wash my feet and my hands and my head. Jesus says the feet is all we need to focus on today.

How this story parallels our own lives is that Jesus also metaphorically wants to wash our feet. Jesus wants to help us be cleansed and freed from our own tendencies towards self-rejection. He is ready and willing to forgive sins. We, however, like Peter can get self absorbed and reluctant to let God or others into our lives, either because we fear injury from God or others, or we are too ashamed of whatever pain we carry. We might wonder if the supreme Lord up in the sky really loves us or whether Jesus really will be kind. Too often our image of the Lord falls prey to an image of a Zeus like God ready to pour down lightning bolts of wrath.

Whatever reason we resist God's love, this morning may I suggest that Jesus in the story of the washing of the disciples' feet shows us that our Lord is compassionate and kind and desires to heal our broken hearts that struggle to receive love.

Friends, as we learn to relate to our gentle, compassionate, servant-hearted and strong Lord, we then grow in our capacity to show compassion and love to others.

This week our hearts broke for our friends in California. Karen and I and our daughters Cate and Chiara spent many years living near Pasadena, CA. Two of our former pastors lost their homes and many other friends are displaced or have lost their homes in the fire. I have watched a lot of Facebook and Instagram posts and videos about the fires and my heart is numb with grief for my friends. What gives me hope is that so many are also mobilizing to care for our friends in California. Churches and other houses of worship are opening up to house people. Firefighters and other first responders are sacrificing themselves to care for those in need. Our own Justice Sandoz was sent to California this week to fight the fires. This too me shows that out of the vulnerability of our world can come tremendous courage, sacrifice and love.

Another inspiration for me this week came in watching portions of Jimmy Carter's memorial service. As we know President Carter was a strong Christian who taught Sunday school and dedicated much of his life after his retirement to peacemaking efforts. He volunteered regularly for Habitat for Humanity and modeled what a servant hearted leader looks like.

Friends, as we mourn with those who are suffering in California or elsewhere, may we find great comfort and hope in Jesus who is the Lord who washes our feet and calls us to follow his example. May we look for ways to show compassion to others. May we bring our own woundedness to our loving God and may we trust that our Lord is good and kind and will carry us through whatever struggles we face in the present or in the future. Jesus truly is the Lord of Lords and we can put our trust in him.

Please pray with me...

John 13:1-15

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already decided[a] that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." 9

Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,[b] but is entirely clean. And you[c] are clean, though not all of you.” 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

12 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.