

Study Questions for BLT 53, no. 3 (summer 2008)

A Community of Friends: John 13: 1-17

By Val Friedell

1. Read aloud John 13:1-20. What, would you say, is the central reason Brethren reenact Jesus' banquet with the Disciples before his death and resurrection?
2. In what ways does the Love Feast depict service? Cleansing? Jesus' approaching death and resurrection? The beginning of the church? Love for friends? Other? Which is most meaningful to you? Why?
3. What are some Love Feast traditions you remember from your home congregation? In most congregations, the deacon visit has been replaced by a simpler period of reflection and preparation. What was lost and what was gained in this shift? What about the shift to allow nonmembers to take part in Love Feast? What was lost and what was gained?
4. "Brethren were demonstrating their equality as mutual servants, eschewing rank that engenders rancor and belies the Gospel." How well do you practice equality in your congregation today? Where could you improve?
5. Raymond E. Brown believes Jesus provides an example in John 13 of laying down one's life in order to create life. How does the sacrifice of Jesus' life create new life?
6. Graydon Snyder and Kenneth Shaffer suggest that "Jesus did this final act of love, prior to the cross, as an indication or paradigm of how persons might share in his glory." What sort of glory do we share with God when we follow the example of John 13? "To call this lifting up of all disciples, 'glory,' as Brown and others do, reminds the student of this scripture that the disciples' Glory is, in fact, that they lose their lives for others." How does our love for our friends glorify God?
7. If the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples were a lesson on serving one another, would Peter have tried to refuse Jesus' offer to wash his feet? Why or why not?
8. Compare John 13:6-8 and Matthew 16:21-23. What does Jesus want Peter to understand in both cases? Why does Peter misunderstand?
9. Service, the author points out, is an obligation, and not always voluntary, as in slavery, but sacrificing for those you love is a gift. What willing sacrifices have you made for someone else? How did it make you feel? In what sense would you be willing to give your life for God?
10. How does this explanation of feetwashing as a reenactment of radical love for others, disregarding rank or power, change your feelings about Love Feast? Why, if at all, do we need this sort of radical demonstration of love in our church communities today?
11. Participation in the Love Feast ritual is diminishing. How could the church revive interest in the ritual? Should it revive the practice? Why or why not?