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Finding Israel in the story of Jacob. Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 12. The Lord is his memorial name. So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.

A merchant in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress. Ephraim has said, Ah, but I am rich. I have found wealth for myself.

In all my labours they cannot find in me iniquity or sin. I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt. I have found wealth for myself.

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I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast. I spoke to the prophets. It was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables.

If there is iniquity in Gilead, they shall surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls. Their altars also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the field.

Jacob fled to the land of Aram. There Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep. By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded.

Ephraim has given bitter provocation, so his Lord will leave his blood guilt on him, and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds. Hosea chapter 12 is a rich and densely elusive chapter. Challenging to understand, it draws extensively upon the story of the patriarchs and the exodus.

A passage that uses a number of word plays, it provides Israel with the archetypal patriarchal narrative as an interpretive foil for its current situation. Ephraim has proved fickle and deceitful in its foreign alliances, and also in its own social and political life. It had vacillated between Assyria and Egypt, and would end up suffering on account of its treachery.

Verse 2 introduces another controversy that the Lord has with Judah, or Jacob. The destiny and identity of the nation is seen to be contained in its forefather. In a moment of national crisis, it will be, in part, through looking at their forefather Jacob, that they will get their bearings again.

As Joshua Moon notes, the two events that are focused upon in verse 3 are the events in which Jacob received his names. In both of the cases, the text of Hosea puns upon the names. Taking by the heel at the beginning of verse 3, plays upon the name Jacob, and at the beginning of verse 4, as Andrew Dearman notes, there is a word play on the word Israel with the verbal phrase that opens the verse.

In the patriarchal narrative of Genesis, the names of Jacob are a very important part of the story. Throughout Jacob's life, he's seeking for a name and a blessing. Originally, he

lacks the blessing as the second born, and the name that he first receives is an unflattering one that connects him with deception.

It is in his struggle with the angel at the Ford of the Jabbok, not coincidentally a place where the letters of Jacob's name are mixed up, that he finally receives a new name and is blessed by the angel. In Genesis chapter 32 verse 28, he receives this name. Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.

Of the two events in verse 3, one relates to the time of his birth, and the other relates to a time when he was a grown man. Among commentators, there are many different readings of the clauses of verse 4. Francis Anderson and David Noel Freedman translate verses 3 and 4 as follows. In the womb, he grabbed his brother's heel.

In his vigor, he contended with God. He contended with God. He overcame the angel.

He wept and implored him. In Anderson and Freedman's account, it seems as though the angel might be the one weeping and imploring Jacob. This presumably was the sign that Jacob had triumphed over the angel in the wrestling match.

Hans Walter Wolff reads it quite differently. In the womb, he tricked his brother. In his wealth, he strove against God.

But God, or the angel, proved himself lord and prevailed. He wept and made supplication to him. In Bethel, he finds him, and there he speaks with him.

John Goldengay sees the weeping and seeking for favour as a reference to Jacob seeking a blessing from the angel. Dwayne Garrett observes a chiasmic structure to these statements, and he also observes the ways that the two names are coded into the text. In the womb, he, Jacob, tripped up his brother.

And in his manhood, he struggled with God. And he, Israel, struggled with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought his favour.

Read in such a chiasmic fashion, the second clause of verse 4 refers back to the first clause of verse 3. In the womb, he tripped up his brother relates to he wept and sought his favour. This then has in view Genesis chapter 33 verses 3 to 4 and 10 to 11, the account of Jacob's meeting with Esau. He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept. Jacob said, No, please, if I have found favour in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me.

Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. Thus he urged him, and he took it. Connecting the second clause of verse 4 with the reunion of Jacob and Esau rounds off the rough account of the story of Jacob.

Jacob is a man defined by struggling, but after wrestling with the Lord and prevailing, he is no longer wrestling with his brother Esau in the same way. They are reconciled. The prophecy now alludes to a further event in the life of Jacob, or perhaps two events, and then it relates it very powerfully to the experience of Israel in the present day.

In Genesis chapter 28, Jacob met with the Lord at Bethel. He saw the vision of the ladder ascending to heaven, and marked the place out as the place of the Lord's dwelling. The Lord had spoken to him there and made a promise in Genesis chapter 28 verse 15.

Behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. This is later referred to on the return journey in chapter 32 verses 9 to 10. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good.

I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant. For with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. These statements seem to be alluded to in verse 6. So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.

This connection drawn between the current nation of Israel and their historical forebear, and namesake, Israel or Jacob, is first explicitly presented at the end of verse 4. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us. Verse 5 also seems to bring in an allusion to Moses' encounter with the Lord at the burning bush in Exodus chapters 3 and 4. There the Lord declared his covenant name to Moses, and here it is the covenant, or the memorial name of God, that is highlighted. Already we could probably think of a number of ways in which these allusions might connect with the current life of Israel.

Israel in the book of Hosea is defined by deception and deceit, much as the earlier life of Jacob. The site of Bethel has also been prominent throughout the book of Hosea as a site of idolatry, the place where Jeroboam the son of Nebat set up the golden calf that caused Israel to sin. This central site of idolatry, however, was the place where the Lord first met with Jacob.

Furthermore, in Genesis chapter 35, Jacob was called back to Bethel, where he rededicated himself and his household to the Lord, and they put away their foreign gods. There the Lord also reiterated the changing of Jacob's name to Israel. A further play on a word is seen in verse 7, where Israel is described as a merchant.

That word for merchant derives from the word Canaan. Israel, it is being suggested, has become like the Canaanites that they once dispossessed. Ephraim, however, is boastful in his wealth.

He wrongly fancies that no one can prove any guilt against him. The word that is used for wealth here is the same word that is used of Jacob's manhood back in verse 3. Other translations of that verse translate it as vigor or wealth. Perhaps we might hear behind this the story of Jacob, who prospered while serving under Laban in Haran, and whose wealth was there closely scrutinized for theft and false dealing.

The Israel of Poseidon's day presumed that like their forefather, they would not be found guilty of false dealing, even while it was engaging in theft, deception and oppression. The Lord's history with Israel had extended over many years. He had spoken throughout their history by the prophets, giving them visions and messages for his people.

He had brought them out of Egypt, an event commemorated in the Feast of Tabernacles, where they would dwell in tents. The Lord could return them to tents once more. There was another wilderness, the wilderness of exile, awaiting them.

Verse 11 refers to Gilead and Gilgal again. Gilead was mentioned earlier in chapter 6, verse 8. Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. And then Gilgal was mentioned in chapter 9, verse 15.

One of the events in the story of Jacob that might have had particular resonance in the days of Hosea would be the story of chapter 31. As Jacob fled from Laban, Laban pursued him and overtook him at Gilead. There Jacob and his house were inspected for the stolen household gods.

And more importantly, a treaty was made between Jacob and Laban, a treaty of peace witnessed to by a pile of stones. However, Israel and the Arameans had been at war for much of the past century. Gilgal was also the site of a pile of stones, set up by Joshua in Joshua chapter 4, as a testimony to the Lord's bringing of Israel across the Jordan.

However, now as these places, Gilead and Gilgal, had, like Bethel, become sites synonymous with sin and rebellion, the curses of the covenant would come down upon them. In speaking of their altars at these sites, like stone heaps, the Lord is probably alluding to these earlier heaps of stones that bore testimony against the people when they broke the covenant. He might also be suggesting that the altars will be torn down.

Such unfaithful altars are little more than impediments. They are like large stones in a field that a farmer is trying to plough. A further connection with the story of Jacob is brought out in verses 12 and 13.

There the Lord relates Jacob's sojourn in the land of Aram with Laban, with the Exodus from Egypt. There are numerous parallels between these stories to be observed. In both

cases, a group prospers as they are reduced to a state of servitude.

In both cases, they leave and are pursued. In both cases, an exceedingly significant event occurs at the crossing of the waters. In the story of the Exodus, the deliverance at the Red Sea.

In the story of Jacob, the wrestling at the Jabach, where he receives a new name and a blessing. The parallel here foregrounds the figure of the prophet. Obviously drawing our minds back to verse 10, I spoke to the prophets.

It was I who multiplied visions and through the prophets gave parables. The Lord deals with his people through the prophets. The prophetic office represents a continual thread of God addressing and guiding his people.

The parallels between the two statements should be observed. Jacob, after fleeing to Aram, laboured for a wife and guarded sheep for a wife. The Lord, through the agency of his prophet Moses, brought Israel up from Egypt and guarded Israel.

Perhaps what the Lord is doing here is drawing a parallel between Jacob, who laboured for his wife, for Laban, and his own labour for Israel in Egypt. Israel is supposed to be the bride of the Lord. She owes him her faithfulness.

In verse 14, we have the final indictment. Ephraim is found guilty. Its blood guilt will not be removed from it.

It will suffer the consequence of its sins. A question to consider, can you think of other occasions in scripture where people are encouraged to look back on previous narratives and to interpret their own experience against the foil of those stories? Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.

Peter said to him, You shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no share with me. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

Jesus said to him, The one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but

is completely clean, and you are clean, but not every one of you. For he knew who was to betray him. That was why he said, Not all of you are clean.

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you, I know whom I have chosen, but the scripture will be fulfilled, He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I am he.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send, receives me, and whoever receives me, receives the one who sent me. After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke.

One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.

So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then, after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, What you are going to do, do quickly.

Now no one at the table knew why he had said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money bag, Jesus was telling him, Buy what we need for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out, and it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you.

You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, Where I am going you cannot come. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward. Peter said to him, Lord,

why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.

Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times. John chapter 13 is a very important chapter, helping us to understand the meaning of Christ's death. We should begin by noticing the similarities between chapter 12 verses 1 to 8, and chapter 13 verses 1 to 11.

There is a meal before the Passover, there is washing feet, there is a reference to coming death. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus performs an action symbolizing his death in his institution of the Lord's Supper. Here, Jesus performs a different symbolic action, with a similar purpose.

We might ask why John omits any reference to the institution of the supper, and why does his chronology seem to place the Last Supper before the celebration of the Passover? Perhaps because John wishes to present Jesus as the Passover Lamb. We see this in chapter 1 verses 29 and 36, also in chapter 19 verse 36. Luke is all about meals and eating, but John has focused upon water and washing, and it's not entirely surprising then that the symbol of Christ's death here is a washing action rather than a meal.

Also, as I've noted on other occasions, John could probably presume that the majority of his hearers were familiar with at least one of the Synoptics. He would not need to repeat something that they were already familiar with. Of course, they would be familiar not only with the story, but also with the instituted practice of the Lord's Supper that they were presumably practicing in their communities.

Verse 1 to 3 present us with a situation within which all of the key details have been aligned, and the scene is fully set for what takes place next. Jesus knows that his hour has come. This was heralded in the preceding chapter with the reference to the Greeks coming.

This was a sign that his hour had arrived. He's going to depart out of the world to the Father. He's loved his own who are in the world, loving them to the end, and during the supper the devil puts into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him, and he knows that the Father has given all things into his hands, that he has come from God, and that he is going to God.

All of the pieces are now in place, and Jesus gets up, takes the towel, washes his disciples' feet, and dries them with the towel. The deliberate manner in which the action is entered into underlines its significance. The more that Jesus is exalted, the more that he serves to serve his people.

The very first thing that Jesus does when he knows that the Father has given all things into his hands is to take those hands and use them to wash his disciples' feet. The

costliness of the liquid was stressed in chapter 12 verse 3 when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with the nard in a way that anticipates this event. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is achieved with a far more costly liquid, with his own blood.

The foot washing ultimately points to what Jesus is going to do in his death. It is a symbol of Jesus' love for his disciples. He loved them to the end, the end referring to his death.

He removes his garments as they will be removed at his crucifixion, wrapping himself in the linen towel as he will be wrapped in linen cloths at his burial. He lays down his life in order to take it up again, and here he lays aside his garments in order to take them up again. The disciples are reclining to eat and their feet would have been outside of the sphere of conversation or fellowship, a realm that Jesus enters, in order to minister to them.

Once again the disciples would only fully understand the meaning of Jesus' action at a later point, when they saw what he did in the cross and resurrection. The washing is absolutely essential. Without Jesus' act of service we would have no part in him, and Peter's objection is in some ways parallel to Judas' objection in the preceding chapter.

Judas objected to the costliness of the liquid that was poured upon the feet and presented this argument that seemed very pious on the surface, that it should be given to the poor. Peter's objection is an objection to the symbolic action displaying the necessary work of Christ. Why should my master, the one who is so much greater than me, engage in this action for me? Judas is headed for betrayal, Peter is headed for denial.

Both of their forms of resistance are resisting something that needs to be done. What should we make of verse 10, where Jesus says that the one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean? Perhaps it should be taken as a reference to baptism and all that that stands for. The feet are the part of the body that come into direct contact with the judgment bearing dust.

The foot washing is more akin perhaps to the forgiveness of sins over the course of the Christian life, as we continually return to our first washing. It isn't just a symbol of Christ's death though, it's also a model to follow. This is the form that our life should take together with others.

It's the way that we should follow the example of Christ in setting aside our supposed priority and putting others before ourselves. Jesus quotes Psalm 49 verse 1, speaking of Judas. The psalm itself has interesting resonances.

Perhaps the opening statement of it, blessed is the one who considers the poor, might remind us of Judas' false concern for the poor in the preceding chapter. The psalm then speaks of enemies saying of David that he is lying down, never to rise up, in the verse

prior to the one that Jesus quotes. David praised God that he would raise him up in verse 10 of the psalm, the verse after the one that Jesus quotes.

All of these themes seem to be fulfilled in Christ's death and resurrection. In the final hours prior to Jesus' capture, we are told that Jesus was troubled in his spirit. A similar expression was used a chapter earlier in chapter 12 verse 27.

The coming of the long awaited hour is a theme that runs throughout the Gospel of John. The hour is the hour of Christ's suffering and his death. It's also paradoxically the hour of his glorification.

Nevertheless, it's a time of great anguish and the troubling of spirit that Jesus experiences here is similar to that described in the synoptic Gospels in the context of Gethsemane. Jesus makes a solemn statement about the fact that one of the twelve will betray him. The disciples, uncertain about what he might mean, inquire among themselves and Simon Peter inquires of the disciple closest to Jesus, the disciple whom Jesus loves, reclining in Jesus' bosom.

This description of the beloved disciple, the author of the Gospel of John, is one that should remind us of chapter 1 verse 18, where the word is described as being in the bosom of the Father. In both cases we see that a witness is qualified for their witness bearing by virtue of their intimate relationship with the one to whom they bear witness. Chapter 13 verse 2 declared that Satan had put the plan to betray Christ into the heart of Judas and now in verse 27 he entered into Judas personally.

This occurred after Jesus gave Judas the morsel. In Romans chapter 12 verse 20, Paul uses a related verb to the noun that John uses here for morsel to describe the way that we should give something to a hungry enemy to eat. As Matthew Colvin has observed in writing about this, Jesus gives a morsel to his enemy at this point.

After he has given that morsel, Satan enters into Judas and Judas goes out. There is a symbolic power to this exchange, beyond the fact that it reveals Jesus' knowledge of his betrayer. This is a final act of grace of Jesus towards Judas, it is a final opportunity for Judas to draw back from the brink.

The words that follow are incredibly powerful and illustrate something of the ability of the gospel writers to establish the emotional tone and theological force of a scene with the greatest economy of details. And it was night. Throughout the scripture, mention of the rising or the setting of the sun are seldom purely incidental.

We might think of the rising of the sun as Jacob limps away from the ford of the Jabbok, or the rising of the sun after the crossing of the Red Sea and the waters coming back over the Egyptians. We might think of the sun setting upon Sodom as the angels meet Lot at the gate. In the gospel of John, the period of darkness that begins here lasts until

the discovery of the resurrection in chapter 20, where the light of a new day dawns.

The gospel of John explores themes of darkness and light throughout. Jesus is the light that has entered into the world. In John chapter 9 verses 4 to 5 we have an example of such speech.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

The sun of righteousness is now going to be eclipsed in death before rising again on Easter morning. Judas goes out into the darkness of the night while the rest of the company remains in the light of Jesus' presence. In giving the morsel to Judas and instructing him to do what he is about to do quickly, Jesus actively consents to and precipitates the events that will lead up to his capture and his crucifixion.

The giving of the morsel and the departure of Judas is something of a watershed. A chapter earlier a similar watershed moment occurred as the Greeks came to see Jesus. Jesus then spoke that the time had come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

In verse 27 to 32 of that chapter he has spoken further about that coming glorification. In verses 31 to 32 of chapter 13 this glorification is in the process of happening. References to the Son of Man are not as common in the book of John as they are in the synoptics.

They are also largely clustered in the first half of the book. When Jesus does speak about the Son of Man, he is mostly speaking about the Son of Man being lifted up or glorified. This probably looks back to Daniel chapter 7 where the Son of Man comes to receive the kingdom from the ancient of days on the clouds of heaven.

The glorification is spoken of as something that has already occurred but also as something that will occur in some sense. It has definitively taken place but in another sense it still waits to be outworked. Jesus here refers back to the conversation that he had with the Jews in chapter 7 verses 33 to 36 where he has spoken about his departure.

There he had said that he would only be with them a little longer, that he was going to the one who had sent him and that they would not be able to find him. Jesus makes a similar statement to his own disciples here. He follows this by teaching them what he calls a new commandment.

A commandment that they love each other as Jesus has loved them. There is perhaps a paradoxical character to this. On the one hand such a commandment to love does not seem to say anything that we do not encounter in the Old Testament itself.

On the other hand however it is described as a new commandment. The paradoxical character of this commandment is even more clearly seen in 1 John chapter 2 verses 7

to 8. Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.

At the same time it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. We see something similar in 2 John verses 5 and 6. And now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments.

This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. We find a related statement in John chapter 15 verses 9 to 10. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. How ought we to understand the newness of this commandment? It seems to me that it is especially important that this love is demonstrated by Jesus himself.

We love as he has loved us. The former commandment to love, which summed up and fulfilled the law, could summarize the commandments, but it had not been concretely realized in history. In the way that the commandment to love is realized in the person of Jesus and in his sacrifice, in the new covenant, love is not just the overriding principle of proper behavior in relationship to God and neighbor.

Love is witnessed in the person of Jesus Christ and in his redemptive action. And the love that is witnessed is the love of God himself. As we receive the love of God in Christ, we should express that love to others as we love them as he has loved us.

Love, then, is not just an ethical principle. It is a fact and reality of history known in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. As we live out of this reality, we are fulfilling the new commandment in which all of the old commandments are fulfilled and brought to their proper telos in the new covenant, writing the law of God upon the hearts of a people that now embody love.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus played out the sacrificial action that he would perform on the cross in washing his disciples' feet and drying them. That is the example that we should follow and it will be the means by which people know that we are his disciples. It should mark us out, rendering us recognizable as the true disciples of Christ.

Picking up on Jesus' statement in verse 33, Simon Peter asks him where he is going and then asks why he cannot follow him. At this point in time, he is already prepared to die for him. In response, Jesus foretells Peter's threefold denial of him.

The crowing of the rooster perhaps related to Peter's own boastfulness. It would serve as

a fitting sign that alerted Peter to the fulfillment of this prophecy. As we see within this chapter, Jesus is neither blindsided by Jesus' betrayal nor by Peter's denial.

He predicts both of them. He is the master of what is taking place, not the mere victim of events or of fate. This helps us in part to understand the paradox of the way in which Jesus' death in the Gospel of John can also be seen as Jesus' act by which he is raised up, an event of glorification.

A question to consider, Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial at the end of this chapter might recall the earlier exchange with Peter in chapter 13 of John, where Peter initially refused to have Jesus wash his feet. How do these conversations between Jesus and Peter help us better to understand the significance of the cross and how the disciples stand relative to it?