

I want you to picture yourself at...seventeen. Who were you at seventeen years old? What were your passions? What did you look like? What were you worried about? What were you totally crazy about? Maybe some of us would rather not remember, maybe some of us *don't* remember, maybe some of us wish we could go back and live that time all over again. Either way, try to get a glimpse of yourself at that age...on the cusp of adulthood and freedom, but still very much a kid. Who were you when you were seventeen?

For me? At seventeen, I was just on the brink of my senior year of high school, content in small town living amongst the cows and cornfields of Southeast Michigan. Junior year of high school had been brutal for a lot of reasons, and so I had come out of the summer and into year seventeen with a different outlook on who I wanted to be. I finally allowed myself a modicum of appreciation for who I had found myself to be, I was alright being the band nerd who also knew how to shoot a basketball pretty well. I had a solid, small group of friends who were just as nerdy and weird as I was, and our time kind of got lost in a haze of back road driving, bonfires, and just being ridiculous, because we were so certain we knew who we were. For the first time ever, I desperately tried to ignore expectations and so I happily listened to my weird emo music that no one else really liked, I

read my books, and I started to toy around with the reality that maybe my life was calling me somewhere other than Michigan. Maybe my life wasn't calling me to being a lawyer like I was so convinced for years that it was. At seventeen, I was weirdly content, with just enough of a hint of unsettled that made me know I wanted something more, even if I couldn't tell you what that was at the time. I look at it now and I realize that at seventeen, I was probably just on the cusp of becoming who I am now...

There's a rose-colored glasses optimism, devil may care, let me take on the world sort of vibe that comes with being a teenager on the verge of adulthood. You are certain you know what you want the world, your world to look like and you're bound and determined to get it. You feel a weird sense of freedom, like the world is before you and you can change it if you just fight hard enough. There's still that vicious fire that burns in your heart that you can shape the world, yourself, to be something more. No one is fully jaded at seventeen. Few of us are straight up pessimistic and done with the world at seventeen. Seventeen feels like...you're on the brink of possibility and hope.

We think about this night, these moments around this table, and our minds are emblazoned with DaVinci's Last Supper. Mostly older men, with long flowing beards, a couple of them already gone entirely gray. We think

of the disciples and we imagine them as full grown *men*, men who have seen a great deal of the world and know what's up, who have street smarts and experience, because they've been around the block a few times. But honestly? That's not really what we have. The reality is, given the times, given what we know of them, the disciples? A good number of them were probably in their late teens, maybe early twenties. I mean sure you have Matthew who was old enough to be a tax collector and Peter who we know was old enough to be married, but the rest? They were probably young.

I mean if you were Jesus and you were setting out to flip the world upside down and fight the oppressive powers of the world, to live an itinerant lifestyle and move from town to town with no certainty for what comes next, who are you going to think will want to come along for that ride? A bunch of older, established guys with families who had had enough time to become jaded and put off by the world to think that change is no longer possible or a pack of scrappy kids with just enough fire in them to want to take the world by storm and kick over some tables? Kids without inhibitions or too many ties to any particular place, who were still figuring out who they were in the world, kids who were at the just the right age to hear the message of the gospel themselves and not shrug it off like a bunch of pie in the sky nonsense because that's just not how the world works.

That's who gathers around this table tonight. That's who Jesus kneels before and lovingly washes their feet, even knowing that in the hours to come, those young feet will tremble with anxiety and fear and carry them off to places where they can hide and keep themselves safe. That's who Jesus loves to the very end. That's who Jesus breaks bread before and pours wine for and says that *for them* he is giving his body and his blood, creating a new covenant that will bring forgiveness and grace and love. That's who Jesus commissions to love as he has loved. That's who Jesus entrusts the message of the gospel to and says take this out into the world and keep it going. A bunch of ragtag teens who have probably done a pretty decent amount of James Dean, rebel without a cause impressions over the last three years. A bunch of teenage boys who hopefully still aren't jaded, because they know that this message came into their lives *right* when they needed it to.

Because think about what you needed to hear when you were seventeen. I know in all of my alleged self-assurance and discovery, there was still that screaming voice of insecurity inside that knew so much of what I was trying to present to the world was a front because no at seventeen I didn't have a thing figured out. I doubt any of us did. I doubt the disciples did. For all of their punk rock, fight the power, take on the world mentality, deep down, they were boys who needed to know they were loved, loved

beyond measure, loved to the very, very end, no matter how many times they messed up, no matter how many times they bailed, no matter how many times they forgot what they had been taught. Think about being seventeen years old and having the person you love more than anything in the world, the person you admire most, kneel before you and cradle your feet and show you love and care and attention. Think about being seventeen years old and having your mentor, your favorite teacher tell you that you're qualified for the job of sharing the amount of love you have received. Think about being seventeen years old and being told you will always be forgiven. I don't know about you but hearing that at seventeen is just going to hit a bit differently than it would at thirty, at fifty, at ninety. Jesus gave these boys a gift, what they desperately needed to hear, and he gave it to them because he knew that there were no better people in the world to keep that message going than those who needed to hear it most themselves.

It's so easy to look at the events of tonight, the events of this week, the words Jesus speaks and feel...jaded. Or feel numb. Or feel nothing, because it's the same thing every year. To look around and say, the world hasn't changed much and all of this is hard and it's really not worth it anyway, so let's go through the motions and call it good. But maybe, for tonight, we need to find the corners of our hearts that are still seventeen.

The corners of our hearts that still believe that this world can be transformed, that love can still win out, that the tables can be turned over, that forgiveness can still be the most powerful thing in the world. The corners of our hearts that still need to hear that we are loved to the very end, that we are equipped for the mission laid before us, that even when we mess up and get it catastrophically wrong we're going to be ok, that even when we run and hide Jesus is going to find us and keep believing in us.

Today, of all days, the world would tell us that we're foolish to believe this stuff. It is April Fools' Day after all. The world would tell us we were foolish at seventeen to believe so ardently in hope and we're even more foolish now if we believe it still, because by now we should know better. But I say, we're all still here tonight because a bunch of punk rock apostles dared to believe in their teenage hearts that they could keep the power of love going in the world even after all seemed lost. So maybe for tonight, we try to rekindle the fervency of our youth, the adamant belief that burned there, and say we're happy to be foolish, we're happy to believe that this kind of footwashing, pouring out of self kind of love is the most powerful force in the world. Remember how ardently you needed to feel that unabashed amount of love and acceptance, and then dare to go out and be it's presence in the world. AMEN!!!