

What Does It Mean to Be Brethren? People who wash feet – John 13:17

Review of Sermon Series: What is the Church of the Brethren?

1. April 3 - People who Count the Cost and Follow Christ - Luke 14:25-33
2. April 10 - People who Find their Peace in Jesus - James 3:18
3. April 17 - People who are Peace-Makers - Romans 12:17-21
4. April 24 - People who seek God's Anointing - James 5:16
5. May 1 - People Who Are Immersed in Christ - Acts 2:38 & Romans 6:4
6. May 8 (Mother's Day) Nate Lycan preaching: People who practice real community – Matthew 18:15-20
7. May 15 - Howard Shockey preaching: People who follow the true religion – James 1:26-27
8. May 22 - Nate Lycan preaching: People who fight Brethren style – Ephesians 6:10-18

Last Week: May 29 - Terry Leach preached – “Who Cares?”

If you knew that you were going to pass away tomorrow, how would you spend your last minutes here on earth? Tell your neighbor.

If I knew that tomorrow would be the last day of my life, the last thing on my mind would be the condition of the feet of those around me.

Jesus, however, had a different concern during His last hours with His disciples. He cared about their feet, and He cared whether or not they were dirty. In His last few hours alive, Jesus cared about whether or not His disciple's feet were crusty! He wanted to make sure that they were clean!

The disciples knew something was going on. They knew that something big was about to happen, and so the Gospel of Luke (22:24) tells us that they started an argument: who will be #2? They knew Jesus would be #1, so they began to argue about who gets to be His right hand man. They wanted power, and Jesus was concerned that their feet and thus their hearts were dirty. No one was willing to stop and think about the condition of their brother's feet, so Jesus wanted to teach them a lesson. He bent down and washed their feet to teach them humility and to teach them what it means to be intimate with Him.

If you have been in the Church of the Brethren for any period of time, you know that we think that Jesus' lesson of washing feet is important. Our Church has always believed that Jesus meant for footwashing to be a vital part of the Christian walk. In fact, twice

a year, we have a footwashing service. But why? Why would we think that washing feet is a part of Christianity?

We have to understand that in Jesus' day, it was custom for the slaves to wash the feet of guests as they entered a home. Jesus wanted to teach the arguing disciples a powerful lesson by taking something ordinary and making it extraordinary.

Let's turn in our Bibles to John 13:1-5. READ

Jesus wanted to teach a poignant lesson with a simple object: A TOWEL.

Jesus wanted it to be clear that He loved them, so He gave them the picture of the towel.

At Lincoln Christian Seminary in Lincoln, IL, graduates look forward to the day when they can walk across the stage and receive their diploma. When their name is called they shake hands with the Seminary's president, take their diploma, and then are given something very special. They are given a towel to remind them that the 2 to 6 year education that they just received is not about a piece of paper, but a life of service.

I believe that every Christian is to be reminded of the same thing: we are not to go after the things the world holds dear (like diplomas, positions, and money), but to pursue the towel that Christ offers.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus wanted to teach the disciples all about life in His last hours by giving them the towel. He wanted to teach powerful lessons through a simple piece of cloth.

The first thing that we should learn from Jesus is that we are called to:

1. Pick up the Towel for Power (John 13:1-5)

Jesus wants to give each of you power to handle life, by giving you a choice: will you pick up the towel and serve others, or will you walk away from the towel. If you choose to pick up the towel by living the life of service, then Jesus offers you REAL POWER!

For a long time now, since at least the late sixties, we've been taught that power is a bad thing. Some teachers have taught that people with power are the bad guys. People who are oppressed or marginalized or in some way held down are the good guys.

Power is a bad. We have heard it said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Jesus offers a different kind of power to His followers. It is not the kind of power that corrupts. It is the kind of power that can help people (and maybe even yourself) get out of the terrible situation they are in.

Jesus offers the kind of power that gives:

- the coward the boldness to stand up for what is right
- the vile and dirty the cleansing to start new
- the hateful the power to forgive
- the murderer a new love for his fellow man
- the sexually immoral a purity that has strength and control
- the alcoholic and addicted the strength to stay straight one day at a time.

How do I know, because I have seen the power of God work in people's lives.

You don't get this power by being manipulative, arrogant, or domineering. You get it by living a humble life in Christ.

Hold your finger on the John passage, but flip with me to Philippians 2:5-8. READ

Jesus realized who He was. John 13:3 - *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.*

This really jumped out at me. It says that He great and powerful He was, SO He washed feet. That word "SO" that begins verse 4 is powerful!

He was the all-powerful one. The Alpha and the Omega. The Faithful and True. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

He was the one who had all the power in the world, and He knew it!

But what did He do? He took up the towel to demonstrate His power. Think about it:

- He didn't enter Jerusalem on a white horse, but on a humble donkey.
- He didn't hang out with the politicians, the popular, or the rich. He came for the sick, the poor, the destitute, sinners, and those in pain.
- He didn't power His way to the throne. He didn't kill others to become King. He laid down His life.

Jesus took up the towel to serve others. When He did, God the Father granted Him power.

READ Philippians 2:9-11

I believe that the same choice is ours: will we pick up the towel? OR will we try to do life our own way? Jesus wants you to pick up the towel of servanthood that He offers. There you will find real POWER for life.

Jesus wants us to:

1. Pick up the towel for power, and...

2. Throw in the Towel for Cleansing (John 13:6-11)

In boxing, if your manager throws a towel in the ring, then the match is over! Throwing in the towel, means that you give up!

READ John 13:6-11

When it came time for Peter's feet to be washed, Peter wasn't willing to let Jesus do it. He thought he had good reason too! Here was Jesus, the King of the Universe, and He was going to wash Peter's feet! Peter knew that he should be the one washing Jesus' feet. Peter refused because he didn't understand.

Jesus told him that unless He washes Peter, then Peter has no part in Him.

The same is true for us. Unless, we are willing to allow God to wash us, then we really have no part in Him. You see, Peter wanted to get religious and set Jesus up as King, before ever considering Him as savior.

There are some Christians who act like this. They think that the Christian life is all about the rules, and the right religion. They think that if they serve an extra hour, read their Bibles, and pray then they have put their time in. Jesus doesn't want your religion but He wants your heart. He wants you to throw in the towel and give your heart to God.

Many of us think that we can deal with the dirt in our lives on our own. What happens when we try to take a towel and clean it ourselves is that the dirt spreads. You don't get clean! DEMONSTRATE

The Christian life is all about throwing in the towel, coming to your wits end, and trusting God. We each have to throw in the towel like Peter did and realize that we need Christ to cleanse us. We can't do it ourselves!

This is a very humbling thing! In fact, our pride can easily get in the way of us throwing in the towel. When we think that we have what it takes to get through this day, this problem, this situation, this life, then we really are not living for Jesus.

Throwing in the towel and saying, "OK, Jesus, I give my life to You!" means that you are set free! Jesus can take all of our dirt, grime, and sin and wash it clean. Jesus wants each of us to throw in the towel so that we each can be refreshed, cleansed, and forgiven.

Jesus wants us to:

1. Pick up the towel for power,
2. Throw in the towel for cleansing, and...

3. Wash feet with the Towel for Blessings (John 15:12-17)

John 13:17 – *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

Jesus promises that if you go and wash feet with the towel, then you will be blessed!

We need to learn to care about people's feet.

Forest Gump once said, "Momma says 'you can tell a lot about a person by the shoes that they wear.'"

Think about it! Cinderella would have never married Prince Charming and had a happy ever after life, if Prince Charming had not cared about shoes.

What kind of shoes do people wear?

1. Dress Shoes – shiny and looks good. You might wear them for church, for a wedding, or for a special occasion. They look great, but if you wear them all day your feet hurt!

These shoes represent some of people who might act like they have it all together. In fact, they know how to act at church, or during special occasions. If they were to get honest, however, they would share that they are really hurting.

We need to learn to wash the feet of those who might act like they have it all together, but really don't! They will tell you everything is great, but you know that they don't have Jesus. Jesus wants you to wash their feet!

2. Work Boots – rugged, tough, dirty, and hardworking. You might wear them to do hard work, to get the job done.

These shoes represent those who have a hard life. They might find it hard to be a Christian, because of the people around them or the situation that they are in. It is hard for them to do what is right. They are tired from all the work and need the refreshing that Christ brings. Jesus wants you to wash their feet!

3. Slippers – these are the opposite of work boots. These are the most comfortable, cozy, warm shoes we have. When you are wearing these, you are relaxed, taking it easy, not exerting yourself too much at all.

These slippers represent those who think they have it easy. They think that they really don't need God or the Church. The fact is though that slippers aren't good for travel or hard roads. When these people's lives begin to hurt, when the stuffing starts to come out of them, we need to be there to patch them up. We need to learn to wash their feet by sharing Christ with them!

4. Sandals – Sandals represent warm weather, summer vacation and fun times. When you are wearing sandals, you're in for a fun time.

These are the people who just want to have fun. They want to ignore the realities of life. What happens when you wear sandals though? Every once in a while, a pebble creeps in! We need to be there when that happens. We need to wash their feet by being Jesus to them!

5. Basketball/Athletic Shoes – give you support, and are comfortable. Allow you to work out, sweat, have good competition and fun. You can run faster, and jump higher with this kind of shoes on.

These are the people who may seem to have life all together. What happens, however, when you take your tennis shoes off? They stink! God wants you to be there for them when life stinks! You should find a way to be a support for them, so that they will ask, "where do you find your strength to face life?" You can answer them by telling them about Jesus. We need to wash their feet by offering them Jesus!

When we wash feet, we need to look at where people are and meet their needs. That is what using the towel is all about.

Those who are :

- Dress shoes need to know that Christ can ease their pain.
- Work Boots need to know that Christ promises, "I'll give you rest."
- Slippers need you when their stuffing falls out and the road of life gets hard. They need to know that Christ has power for their lives.
- Sandals need to see that life is not about having a good time. Life is about falling in love with Jesus.
- Athletic shoes need your help to learn to run for the prize of heaven.

No matter where a person is, Jesus wants you to take the towel of servanthood and wash their feet.

Maybe you are asking, "what is it in for me? What will I get if I do this?"

Jesus promises that you will be blessed, if you wash feet! This is one of the few times that Christ literally promises something in return for service to others. He says you will be blessed if you wash feet. Your life will have God's favor if you wash feet.

Not only that, if you wash other people's feet, if you serve others, then you are impacting their lives. What you do for others, might mean that they give their lives to Christ and that they are in heaven with you!

That has to be the ultimate incentive!

It's not about actual soap and water and washing people's feet. It is about figuring out what you can do help someone else in their time of need.

Jesus wants you to learn that we should:

1. Pick up the towel for power,
2. Throw in the towel for cleansing, and
3. Wash feet with the towel for blessings.

We are about to take communion. Communion is your time to throw in the towel.

Is Jesus your savior? #549 – *Savior of My Soul*