

THE POWER OF SERVING EACH OTHER – JOHN 13:14-15

We're going to conclude today's sermon in an unusual way. The message is based on Bible passage that is familiar for some. Today's passage is about foot washing. Jesus said, "You ought to wash one another's feet." So today we're going to put that command into practice. If you want to, please remove one of your shoes and socks in preparation for the service.

I'm just joking. We aren't really going to have a foot-washing service today, but I know that I have your attention. Why were you uncomfortable for a few seconds?

Why does footwashing make us so uncomfortable?

- Maybe you were embarrassed for the visitors. You were thinking, "Oh no, they won't come back!"
- Maybe you were uncomfortable, because of embarrassment:
 - I don't want someone touching my feet – they might tickle me and I would laugh during something that should be serious!
 - My feet are unattractive
 - I've got a damaged toenail
 - I've got corns
 - I've got these ugly bunions
- Today, I want you to know what footwashing meant in the first century. Feet were visible and smellable at the dinner table in the first century. The tables that they sat at were low. The feet of the person you were sitting next to, would probably be at your elbows as you reclined at the table. It was important that they be clean! A person would usually give more attention to the washing of his feet before a meal than we do our own hands.

Jesus said in John 13:14-15 - *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* In saying this, Jesus is calling us. He is inviting us to follow His example in our attitudes.

This past Friday night, Sarah and I went to District Conference and stayed in a hotel. If you have ever stayed at a hotel, you know that the experience is all about you! Are you hungry? Pick up the phone and order room service. In a hotel, you can take a hot shower for as long as you want without thinking about the water bill! After you take your long shower and dry off, what do you do with the towel? Why, you throw it on the floor for someone else to pick up. At the hotel, I can run the air conditioner at 12 degrees without even thinking about the electric bill! I don't have to make my bed. When I wake up, there is a newspaper waiting outside my door and a continental breakfast waiting for me down the hall. The hotel life is the life—to be served, waited on, and to have my every need met.

But with His life and death as a man, Jesus, God in the flesh, turned everything upside down—the first will be last, the greatest will be the least, the way up is down. In Mark 10:45 (NIV) Jesus explained, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Even to His last breath, He showed the truth of that passage of Scripture!

Turn with me to that passage in John that talks about the foot-washing scene in the Bible: John 13.

This passage is so remarkable, because we are going to see:

- The Creator serving His creation.
- The One who possesses everything making Himself nothing.
- The One who used the world as His footstool will now wash the feet of the world.

The life that He calls us to is not the life of a robe, but the life of a towel.

In John 13 we step into an upper room of a house with Jesus and his 12 disciples. It's after sundown on Thursday evening. The disciples had been arguing over who was the greatest. This was the third time they had had such an argument. Jesus' time with these men was up; within 24 hours Jesus will be dead. The time for sermons was over, and so on this night Jesus picks up a towel. The room grows quiet as the status-seeking disciples realize that the one bearing the towel and washing their feet is the Son of God.

READ John 13:1-17

After Jesus finishes He says to the disciples, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17 NIV). If you are a follower of Christ, you have been called to serve others, to be a foot-washer, a towel bearer, a servant. But what does it mean today to wash feet?

In this story, I want you to know a few things about servants. I want you to see what Jesus is calling you do in this example that He set:

I. We are called to know who we are in Christ.

Three times, this passage says something clear: that our example in service, Jesus, knew!

1. Jesus knew what was going to happen next. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus knew that the TIME had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. He knew he was rapidly approaching the most important moments of life. He knew that the pain and agony of the cross was imminent!

Here is the Question: If you knew that you would die a terrible death tomorrow, what would you be focused on? What would be on your heart?

I can tell you I would probably be thinking about myself and what I'm about to go through. Not so with Jesus. He thinks of others! What would you do if you knew it was the last days of your life? Would you want to be alone in prayer? Record some final thoughts? Would you spend that time with loved ones? Would you go around and share recipes or gardening tips or would you focus on what's important? Jesus knew what was important and knew His time was short. He spent the last hours of His life teaching the people who were closest to Him to love and serve.

John is wanting us to see this about Jesus. Fully God and fully man, here is Jesus facing something we can not even imagine. He is not saying to the disciples, "Don't you care about what I'm facing?" He is not focused on himself. He is concerned that they be prepared for what's about to happen. Jesus is focused on others!

We see that in Jesus through out the Passion Week. At his arrest, His concern was that the disciples be let go. When on the cross, He is concerned about his mother's future. There in his last hours, He offers forgiveness to the thief on the cross. Under maximum pressure, He remains totally unselfish and loving toward the people around Him.

John is saying to you and me—think about it—he knew what was coming!

If you are in Christ, then you know your future! You can have confidence that heaven awaits you! This confidence can give you the power to serve others!

2. Verse 3 says “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;” He knew Who he was and yet He bowed before these disciples and washed their feet. He was not ignorant of the glory and authority that the Father had given him. It was because of who He was that He showed them how to serve others! Let me say that again: It was because of who He was that He showed them how to serve others!

It was because he knew who he was—because He was SECURE in His own IDENTITY that He could bow to the lowest point of service. It is not great men who will not serve others—it is insecure men. No matter what position they hold, if a person thinks that serving others makes them less than others, then they do not have the heart of Jesus. That person will not serve in lowly tasks because he or she sees it as a challenge to his own identity.

So who are you in God? Maybe you need to be reminded today. If you are in Christ: You are God’s child. The heads on your hair are numbered. Your life was planned before creation. You were knit together in your mother’s womb. You are the apple of God’s eye. You are the target of His love! You are the reason God sings!

Zephaniah 3:17 - *God will rejoice over you with great gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will exult over you by singing a happy song.* You are God’s treasured possession!

Notice something else Jesus knew,

3. verse 11 says “For he knew who was going to betray him...” Sitting around the table are the disciples. There is Judas, full of deceit, full of hypocrisy, about to “stab Jesus in the back.” There is Peter, full of big words and little action, a guy who would curse and say He never knew His savior. There is Thomas, who even though he heard Jesus say, “destroy this temple, and I will build it again in three days,” never really believed. Thomas doubted Jesus, even when the other disciples told him about the resurrection! Thomas had to touch Jesus himself before he believed. Jesus bent down and cleaned their feet!

Jesus knew who would betray Him! What does Jesus do with that information? What would I do with that information? Jesus does not distance himself from Judas, Peter, Thomas, or the other disciples. Jesus does not turn on Judas and say to him, “How dare you—after all I’ve done for you?” Instead Jesus loves him to the end.

Can you wash the feet of your enemies? Can you serve a person that may or may not return kindness?

Last night, coming back from the District Conference, Sarah and I stopped at Best Buy to make a return of a DVD that someone had bought us. We already had the Disney movie, *Mulan*, so we wanted to get store credit. We walked through the door, had the security officer put a sticker on the item, and went over to the Return Desk. The guy behind the counter, took the item and the gift receipt that we had. He simply went to his computer and didn’t say a word to us. He then told us that the movie had put back on the credit card. I then explained to him that the credit card that he was putting it back on was not mine. The item was a gift. He then informed me that I should have said something, because now that it was returned, he couldn’t do anything. I was hot! Here I had studied this passage all week about serving others, and I wanted to go off on this guy who I didn’t even know. I started into him, and asked “Why didn’t you ask me what I wanted? Why didn’t you even talk to me before you punched in things at your computer? I want to speak to the manager!” I confess: I wish I had done that differently. I wish that I was more of a servant in that instant. It was a mistake, not a deliberate action. I should have had more grace. Why? Because I have been touched by grace, and in those instances, I need to learn to serve, even those who are expected to serve me according

to their job description. That is what I want for the people of this congregation: to learn to serve like Jesus did.

Jesus didn't discriminate, even when He knew who would betray Him.

- It's so difficult to serve people that have hurt us.
- It's difficult to serve when you've been taken advantage of and unappreciated.

Jesus scrubs the same feet that would lead soldiers to arrest him and calls us to do the same. Jesus could do this, because He knew who He was in God. Do you know who you are?

1. We are called to know who we are in Christ.

II. **We are called to be humble** – READ John 13:4-5.

Let's face it, this footwashing from Jesus was:

- Inconvenient – you have stoop down to do it! When we sit down for a meal, we don't like to get back up. When you are at a restaurant, you don't like to perform the waiter's or busboy's job. You expect good service. Yet, Jesus interrupted His meal, got up, and performed the task of the servant.
- Undignified – Jesus took off His outer garment, lest His clothes get soaked. He bared His chest and legs, knelt down on the hard floor, and began to wash the 24 dirty feet.
- Unsanitary – The disciple's feet probably had rashes, corns, warts, and fungus. He washed and dried them without rubber gloves. He touched them in love!
- Unfair – Judas and Peter and Thomas were there! One would betray Him, one would deny Him, and the other would doubt Him! Yet, He bent down and washed their feet!

- A. A person who truly seeks to follow Jesus' example is content with getting no recognition
1. You know that it is not our custom today to wash feet. People in the New Testament time went either barefoot or wore sandals. Their feet were dirty because of the unpaved, unstoned, dusty roads! When you entered a house in the first century, just like taking someone's coat today, it was normal for a host to have his servants wash your feet. In fact, it was rude not to.
 2. Not so today! Since it is not our custom today, it would be rude to ask a stranger to wash someone else's feet! In fact, it was rude to ask a person in the first century to wash someone's feet. It was a job looked down upon. In fact, Jewish slaves were not even required to do it – this was a job for Gentile slaves!
 3. A servant like Jesus can be humble enough to do even the dirtiest of jobs. One preacher said: "A servant's job is to do all he can to make life better for others – to free them to be everything they can be. A servant's first interest is not himself but others."

Philippians 2:3-8 β have them turn there

- B. A person who truly seeks to follow Jesus' example understands that Jesus served despite His own problems. Did you notice that Jesus bent down and washed feet even though He had a great trial ahead of Him?
1. Jesus knew he would be nailed to a tree within 24 hours, but He picked up a towel and He served.

2. Maybe you're tempted not to serve because your bogged down by so many problems.
3. Maybe you rationalize that you don't need to serve because you're overworked, or out of work; you've got a terminal illness, or elderly parents, or whatever.
4. Jesus is calling you to serve even in your problems.

C. A person who truly seeks to follow Jesus' example understands there is a link between prayer and service. Jesus was in tune with God that He can say in verse 50 of the previous chapter, "What I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

1. You see, real prayer and real service take the same position: they both require a person kneeling down for them to really work. Prayer requires a person to take a similar stance when they are serving – lowering themselves. Maybe people aren't willing to serve, because they aren't kneeling in prayer on a regular basis. Maybe people aren't praying, because they are not stooping to serve others – they really don't have an urgency to pray. You don't see the need to pray, unless you are humbling yourself in service. You don't see the need to serve, until God reveals it to you in prayer. You want your prayers to start having meaning: serve. You want your service to have real power: pray!
2. In our acts of service, we need to be sure to have Zechariah 4:6 in the back of our minds - *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty!* This means that our prayers fuel our service!
3. Why don't people have an attitude of prayer when they serve? It is probably because they had the same attitude of Peter. Look at verses 6 through 9.
 1. Peter needed Jesus' touch and washing, but thought he was above that. I truly believe that this is a big example to us today.
 2. Often times, when we approach things in the church, we think we can do it on our own.
 3. Our Pride may tell us to skip asking for God's help. We say things like:
 - a. I can handle my problems myself – I don't need a counselor
 - b. I would never lower myself to ask for financial assistance
 - c. I can find it myself. I don't need to stop and ask directions!
 - d. I'll wash my own feet, Jesus!
 4. We need to be like Peter and when we realize that Jesus wants to do for us, we need to say "WASH ALL OF ME!"

From this passage, we should see that:

1. We are called to know who we are in Christ
2. We are called to be humble

III. But you see, ultimately, **We are called to serve.** To actually do something. To actually begin an entire lifestyle of service.

A. James 1:22-25 - *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

B. This lifestyle of service that Jesus is calling you to is counter to our human nature.

1. Infants and children are selfish, always thinking of their own needs.
2. Married people sometimes say to their spouse, "It's your job to make me happy – to meet my needs," and that causes problems.
3. Some people carry this mindset over to their Christian life, expecting God to "make me healthier, make me happier, make me thinner, make me wealthier. Come on God, do your job – Make me happy."
4. Some people come to church with the desire to be fed and served rather than to serve.
5. The church should be a place where people find real love and service. Gary Burge, a write of one commentary, said, "Nothing so astonishes a fractured world as a community in which radical, faithful, genuine love is shared among its members. There are many places you can go to find communities of shared interest. There are many places you can go find people just like yourself, who live for sports or music or gardening or politics." The church is called to serve to show the world Jesus!

C. This lifestyle of service is what Jesus saved you for! Galatians 5:13 - *For you have been called to live in freedom—not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love.* Freedom to serve one another in love! Notice today, that I didn't list out ways that you can serve. If you are free in Christ and you keep your focus on what God wants, I believe that God will reveal ways you can serve! He will make it abundantly clear how He wants you serve.

D. It begins first, however, with your relationship with Him. I held up this passage in John 13 today, because it is the example of Christ that we should follow. But if you are not a follower of Christ, then why bother?

While we aren't having a footwashing service today, we are having communion today.

I have shared with you that:

1. We are called to know who we are in Christ
2. We are called to be humble
3. We are called to serve

I truly believe that unless you have been touched by Jesus Christ, this sermon means nothing to you. This is why we are going to have communion. Communion is a time to be touched by Christ. A time to be washed by Christ.

Is your heart ready? We are going to hear a song and then sing a song. I want you to know that Jesus wants you to prepare your heart through these two songs, so that your heart will be ready for communion and what the bread and cup represent. When Camille sings, listen for God's voice in the message. When we sing as a congregation, listen to the words and use the song as a prayer. Jesus is softly and tenderly calling!

Special Presentation

Softly & Tenderly Jesus is Calling—Hymnal, a Worship Book #491

Communion - Please feel free to take the emblems as they are passed and hold them until you are guided to take them together. All those who have made a decision to follow Christ may take communion with us.