

Jesus Washes Feet
March 10, 2024
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This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church. And for the many that are not joining us in person this morning because they did forget to set their clocks, welcome to you online and glad you got that option!

I want to read a passage of Scripture that comes from the book of John, the Gospel according to John, chapter 13.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, now he showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served. The devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize what I am doing now, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath need only wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

May God bless the reading of the Word.

A number of years ago, I took the church staff and some of the leadership to the Leadership Institute at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, Missouri. Now the Church of the Resurrection is the largest United Methodist Church in the United States, well over 20,000 members. At one campus they worship around 8500 people a week, and they have six campuses. It was a wonderful conference. But I can only 'people' so much and I have to have a break. And so, we were in the middle of the conference, and I was probably supposed to be in some meeting somewhere, but I went for a walk. And one of the hospitality team was outside, and I was talking with them about the Church of the Resurrection, and a car pulled into the parking lot. Now I noticed it, for whatever reason, and to say their parking lot is large--ours looks like a postage stamp compared to theirs. And this car pulls in and it goes all the way to the very back of the lot. And I thought it might be some teenagers coming to pull in and do whatever. And the guy that

was with me said, "Oh, Pastor Adam's here." Pastor Adam is Adam Hamilton, who is the senior pastor of this huge church. And he pulls in to the very back of the lot. And I said, "Why in the world is he parking way out there? There's at least 150 to 250 places right here." He said, "Well, that's his spot. He parks there no matter what the weather, no matter what the circumstances, no matter how many people are here. That's his spot. He tells us he parks out there so he makes sure that everybody else who needs a spot closer, has one." (I went out there. I drove out there later on to look at it, and sure enough, next to the last spot in the parking lot is a sign that says, "Reserved for Senior Pastor." I asked him. I said, "Why do you do that? Why do you park in that spot?" He said, "Well, I leave the last one for somebody more worthy.") Anyway, back to my story, I was watching him walk across the parking lot, and he was bending over and picking up stuff in the parking lot. And I said, "What is he doing now?" And the guy that was with me said, "He's picking up cigarette butts in the parking lot." The Senior Pastor of the largest United Methodist Church in the United States!

I have a thing for C's. I think a successful marriage has four C's: Christ, communication, compassion, and compromise. I have four C's for a successful hire: competency, commitment, chemistry, and character. Competency, you can measure. You can see it in the resume; you can hear it in their experience. Commitment, you can hear as they talk about their commitment to Christ and their commitment to the Church. Chemistry, you can feel: Are they going to fit in with this team? But the wildcard is character. You either got it or you don't. I've heard it said that you show your character by what you do when nobody's watching. It's your true character.

In our passage, we see clearly the true character of Jesus Christ. This event takes place just hours before he is arrested. We see in this Jesus' true character, in who he is and who he wants his followers to be. Our passage tells us, at this moment he knows that all things have been given into his hands. He knows that his hour of humiliation and his hour of glorification have come, in the form of a Roman cross. Our passage tells us that all power and all glory were given into his hands. At this moment he knows he is the Lord of all and the King of kings. And how does he express all of this power? How does he express this glory? By washing his disciples' feet. And we hear him say to us, "Do as I have done for you."

Our passage tells us that he knew he had come from the Father, and that he was returning to the Father. We know that at this moment he is closer to God than he has ever been, because he is about to return to the Father. Now, at this point he could have, as they say, mailed it in. He could have said, "You know, my job on earth is done." And yet, he humbled himself to do the work of a slave. At this late hour he could have said, "If the disciples haven't got it by now, they're never going to get it." But he saw the opportunity for one last example of what he wanted them to be. And we hear him say, "Do as I have done for you." At this moment he knew he was going to be betrayed, abandoned, and denied, and yet we see no hatred, no bitterness. And in fact, there's something very poignant that takes place. At a Jewish Feast, there are two places of honor. The disciples are at the table, reclining at the table, participating in the meal. There are two places of honor: one of them to the right of the host, one to the left of the host. We know from the Gospel accounts that the apostle John had the one to the right of Jesus. And to the left of Jesus was Judas. Jesus washed Judas' feet just before he betrayed him. He met the greatest injury and the greatest disloyalty and the greatest insult with the greatest humility and the greatest love. And he says to them, "Do as I have done for you."

Now, this is extra. I'm not going to charge you for this! This is not in our passage, but it is from Luke's account of this event. He says that shortly before they arrived at the upper room for the Passover feast, these knot-heads were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Luke 22:24 says, "A dispute arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." Just moments before our passage, these guys are arguing about who is the greatest. So, let me pause here to give you a little history as to what's going on at this moment. If you are invited to a Jewish home for a meal, that is a tremendous privilege. Number one, that doesn't happen very often. You are supposed to bathe before you go, and when you get there, during that era, if the family had a slave or a servant, they washed the feet of the guest when they arrived. If they did not have a servant, or they did not have a slave, the person of lowest rank in the house was supposed to wash the feet of the guest when they arrived. Now, there were no servants. There were no guests. This was their meal. Everybody knew that somebody ought to wash everybody's feet. But what were they arguing about? "Who's the greatest?" Everybody knew that at least somebody ought to wash Jesus' feet. But to do so would be to humiliate yourself and recognize yourself as the lowest person, a person of lowest rank. And so, nobody washed anybody's feet.

They are reclining at the table. Jesus himself, their Lord and Master, gets up from the table, takes off his outer garment, wraps a towel around his body, and begins to wash the disciples' feet. If you were there, would that be humbling? Would that be poignant? Jesus did what they should have done. Jesus did what he wanted them to do. Jesus did what he wants us to do. And we hear him say, "Do as I have done to you."

In Christ's kingdom there is only one kind of greatness, and that is service. So, when you're tempted to think about your dignity, to think about your prestige, to think about your place, to think about your rights, to think about your power, I want you to see Jesus with a towel wrapped around his waist, washing the disciples' feet. When you are arrogant and entitled, and, as we would say in the South, "getting uppity," I want you to see our Lord and Master washing feet. When your time is short, and you have been a good servant, but you feel like you've given all you need to give, you've done all you need to do, I want you to see Jesus, hours before his death, washing feet. When you are at your most powerful, when you are at the height of life, and you think you are all that, I want you to see Jesus washing feet.

We are called to be servants. And if you would be a leader of any kind in Christ's Church, then you must be a servant, first and foremost. And, oh yeah, there's the example of Peter, who said, "Oh, Lord, you're not going to wash my feet." I know that there's nobody here that is too proud to accept service, somebody helping them. Nobody too proud to accept the help of someone else. When I was in seminary, one of the classes that was very beneficial was a class simply called, "Practical Pastoring." It was taught by the assistant dean of the seminary, Dr. Cothan. Dr. Cothan often said, "If you want to be a pastor, you will need a servant's towel, not a king's scepter."

On this third Sunday of Lent, a time of reflection, a time of self-examination, have we been guilty of being too good for menial service? Have we had our feelings hurt, and betrayed, and not followed Jesus' example? Have we been guilty of saying, "Well, I have done my part"? I want to give you just a few moments to reflect on that, give you a few moments to think of how you might follow Jesus' example. I want you to hear him saying to you personally, "Do as I have done for you." Let us pray.

Lord, forgive us when we are too arrogant, too entitled, to do menial service. Lord, remind us that those who are great in Your kingdom are the servants of all. And help us, Lord, to follow our Lord's example. In Christ's name, amen.