



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for February 21, 2021**  
**“In His Steps: Always Ready to Serve”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: John 13:1-9,12-17**

### **A Broader View**

The Gospel of John gives a broader view of what went on in the Upper Room the night Jesus was betrayed. While the last supper is not so much mentioned as it is in the other gospels, Christ’s desire to teach about servanthood is.

It is in John’s gospel where we find the account of Christ washing the disciples’ feet. By so doing, Jesus offers a supreme example of what it means to be a servant leader.

On the surface, the story seems uncomplicated, yet we can infer there is a lot though going on around that table. Judas had betrayal on his mind. James and John were concerned about where they would be seated at the table. The rest of the disciples sensed something was up. They did not want to admit it, but they knew the end was near.

Jesus and his disciples reclined on couches around a low table. Just like the one Ashlee showed on Ash Wednesday. Their feet were extended, while they propped themselves up by their left elbows. This freed up their right hands so they could eat.

Customarily, a household servant would wash the feet of the guests before dinner. Jesus and his disciples did not have any servants, so they were left to do it themselves. It never dawned on the disciples to do that. That would be much too demeaning.

So, amid the clatter of dishes and the smell of food, Jesus got up, took off his outer garment, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples’ feet. Let’s read about that account as we turn to the scripture. We read today from John 13:1-9, 12-17. Hear this from God’s word.

### **John 13:1-9, 12-17**

*“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

*The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> 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 now what I am doing, 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!"*

*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 also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, 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*

### **Christ Our Example**

We learn a lot about Jesus in this passage. Jesus was willing to do what none of the disciples were open to doing.

As some have said, *"The disciples were ready to fight for a throne, but not a towel."* They were more concerned about where they were seated around the table, than seeing to the needs of those with whom they were eating.

Jesus though was concerned about the needs of those around the table. Jesus was all about serving others. He would go to any lengths to see to the needs of others, even if it meant his death on the cross. When it comes to having a servant's heart, Jesus is the quintessential example.

In fact, he says this about himself in Luke 22:27, *"I am among you as one who serves."*

In our passage for today he says, *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

Who are we to think that we should not do as he did when it comes to service?

### **Servanthood Borne Out of a Humble Heart**

Christ's desire to serve was borne out of a humble heart. Paul writes about that in Philippians 2:6-7. He says, *"And being in the nature God, Christ did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."* Jesus emptied himself taking on the form of a servant.

Just preceding that in Philippians 2:5 Paul encourages us to do the same. *"Have the same mind as that was in Christ Jesus."*

On that night when Jesus washed his disciples' feet Jesus knelt before his disciples in an act of humble service. That sort of posture should be ours as well. I have heard it said, *"No one stands taller than when they stoop to serve."*

So, the questions come:

- *“How are you following the example of Christ when it comes to serving others?”*
- *How open are you to following his lead in that regard?”*

Mother Teresa, who was one of the great servants of the twentieth century said about herself, *“I simply want to be a pencil in God’s hand.”* She was willing to let God write her story when it came to serving others. She was that faithful, that obedient, that willing to serve.

We sing it all the time, *“I want to live like that.”*

*“I want to live like that and give it all I have, so that everything I say and do points to you.”*

Albert Schweitzer once said, *“One thing I know, the only ones among you who will be really happy, are those who will have sought and found a way to serve others.”* Christ is our example in this.

### **Learning about Ourselves**

Just as we learn a lot about Jesus in this passage, we also learn a lot about ourselves. We do that, no more clearly than in Christ’s interaction with Peter. You will recall that Peter was quick to refuse Christ’s offer to wash his feet. *“You will never wash my feet,”* Peter said defiantly.

If you have ever had your feet washed, it is quite disarming. In fact, for me, it is much easier to wash somebody else’s feet than to have somebody to wash mine. Peter’s reaction to Christ’s gives us a glimpse into that.

I am of the mind Peter was overwhelmed with a sense of vulnerability the night Christ offered to wash his feet. Peter realized that he was not as clean as he thought himself to be. While there is no doubt that Peter’s feet needed washing, his heart did as well. Peter needed a cleansing of a different sort, which would come later upon Christ’s death and resurrection.

I am of the mind that upon Christ’s offer to wash his feet that Peter felt an overwhelming sense of unworthiness. He most likely felt that he wasn’t good enough to allow Jesus to do what he wanted to do.

When it comes down to it, none of us are good enough. None of us are worthy of the cleansing power of our Lord. That’s why we talk so much about grace, the free gift of God’s love. We don’t earn our way into God’s favor. God’s favor is simply given.

### ***It Is Better to Give Than Receive***

You have heard it said that *“it is better to give than receive.”*

Paul quotes that phrase as having come from the lips of Jesus in Acts 20:35. *“It is better to give than receive.”* Christ’s desire to wash his disciples’ feet all but seals that.

It is also good to receive. In fact, it is critical to receive, which is the very thing Jesus wanted to get across to Peter, notwithstanding to you and me. We will never be able to give unless we first received.

That's the way it is with love. We are only able to offer love to the extent we have received loved. That's why it is so important for us to open ourselves to the love God so longs to give us. Because "*God first loved us,*" we are then able to turn and love those who are around us, even those who are tough to love.

*"We love because he first loved us."* 1 John 4:19

When it comes right down to it, Peter needed to receive what Jesus was offering. He not only needed to have his feet washed but needed to let Jesus do everything else he was trying to do in his life.

Peter needed to empty himself of his pride and his desire to always be in control.

That kind of thing is all too often at play when it comes to us receiving somebody's help. Remember what Ashlee encouraged us to do a couple of weeks ago, "*When someone wants to help, let them.*"

That's particularly true when it comes to the sort of help Jesus comes to offer. His help is the sort of help that supports us not only now, but for all eternity. Jesus knew exactly what Peter needed. He also knows what we need as well. Jesus knows that we too need to receive what he is trying to do in our lives.

For Peter, what Christ offered in his death and resurrection would later help him overcome the guilt of his three denials. What Christ offered in his death and resurrection would help fit Peter for the role he would later play as a servant leader in the early church.

What Christ offers in his death and resurrection meets us in our own unworthiness and vulnerability to transform our lives.

### **The Pitcher and Bowl**

I was given this pitcher and bowl a few years back upon finishing my term as Chair of our Board of Ordained Ministry. I have them in my office, and they are a sure reminder of Christ's call to serve. This pitcher and bowl remind me to be on the lookout for opportunities to "*wash*" the feet of others.

They remind me to leave myself open to the help Christ so longs to give. They help me remember I don't have it all together and that I am certainly in need of the help Christ so longs to give me.

I would do well to remember to let him "*wash*" my feet and you would do well to do the same.