

On a night like this centuries ago Jesus transformed the Passover Seder meal into the Lord's Supper. This was the Last Supper that Jesus would share with His disciples prior to His crucifixion. This event is so critical to our Christian faith that it is recorded in all four gospels; however, the Gospel of John gives us additional insight into the character and love of Jesus that the others do not. Listen to what John says in the thirteenth chapter, verses 1-17, and verses 31-25

Read John 13:1-17, 31-35

Have you ever wondered what Jesus was thinking about on this eventful night? This was the last night that He would spend alone with His disciples; this handpicked group that had been with Him for the last three years of His ministry. Put yourself in His place as they sit around the table. What was going through His mind on this fateful night? Let's look at several things that our text implies that He knew.

First, Jesus knew that His Father had given Him control over all that would happen. He knew that His hour of suffering and humiliation was near, but He also knew that His hour of glory and resurrection was also near. Such knowledge might well have filled Him with pride, but what does He do – He washes the feet of His disciples. At the moment when He might have shown supreme pride, He demonstrated supreme humility. Love is always like that!

Sometimes we feel that we are so important, so distinguished, and of such a high social status that such humble acts of service are beneath us; but not so for our Lord and Savior. He knew that He was Lord of all, yet He took time to wash the feet of His disciples. To wash the feet of a guest at a meal was the duty of a servant. We must remember that God is not looking for more super stars; He's looking for more servants.

There's a story of a church member who approached his pastor and said: "You preachers talk a lot about 'do unto others,' but when you get right down to it; it comes down to basin theology." The pastor asked what he meant by "basin theology." The man said: "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before His death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: which one will you use?"

Later in chapter 13, Jesus drops a bombshell. No sooner had the disciples returned to their seats than Jesus informs them that one of them would betray Him before the night is over. Knowing this might make any of us bitter, but not Jesus. Instead of holding a grudge, He washes the feet of the very person who will betray Him – Judas. This was truly an act of love.

In addition, Jesus knew that not only will Judas betray Him, but before the night is over Peter will deny Him three times and all those at the table with Him will desert. So what does He do? He washes their feet. The roads of Palestine were dirt and dusty. The common people wore sandals which gave little protection against the dust and mud. Thus it was customary for a servant to wash the feet of a guest when they arrived at someone's home for a meal. On this night, Jesus assumed the role of a servant; He did what the disciples had not thought of or were not willing to do. So, when the opportunities to serve present themselves, do we act like the disciples and sit on our dignity, or do we follow the example of Jesus?

Now there is more to this story than the Apostle John tells us in his gospel. In the Gospel of Luke we are told that an argument broke out among the disciples as to which one was the greatest. It might have been an argument over who got the best seats at the table – the ones closest to Jesus. Think about it, here's Jesus facing betrayal, death and the cruelest form of punishment – death on the cross, and His disciples are acting like children. It may well be that it was this particular argument that led Jesus to assume the role of a servant. He was clearly demonstrating that the one who serves is the greatest. He told His disciples that He came not to be served but to serve. And He expects nothing less of us.

So why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet? Let me suggest three possible explanations. First, He did it out of love. Look at the first verse in our text – "Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love." Having loved His own – His disciples and each of us. Romans 8:39 promises that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Jesus showed the full extent of His love; He was willing to do anything for His disciples and for us. Not just the duties of a servant such as washing feet, but the ultimate sacrifice, to die on a cross for us, to suffer the agony and humiliation of the death of a common criminal so that we might know the extent of His love and experience forgiveness and eternal life if we only believe in Him with all our hearts. Jesus' life of service and love would lead to the cross.

You know you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. That's unconditional love. A boy once asked his father what kind of love was unconditional. To which the father replied: "Remember the two boys who used to live next door to us and the cute little puppy they got last Christmas?" "Yes" "Do you remember how they used to tease it, throw sticks and even rocks at it?" "Yes" "Do you remember how the puppy would always greet them with a wagging tail and would try to lick their faces?" "Yes" "Well, that puppy had an unconditional love for those two boys. They certainly didn't deserve his love for them because they were mean to him. But he loved them anyway." God's love for us is also unconditional. Men threw rocks at His Son Jesus, hit Him with sticks and even killed Him. But Jesus loved them anyway.

Second, Jesus wanted to set an example for us to follow. On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus once again turned the expectations of the world upside down by assuming the role of the lowliest servant in the household in order to wash the disciples' feet. Jesus demonstrated an attitude of humility and service. We, like the disciples, are challenged today to set aside our desires for power and position, just as He did. We are to follow Jesus into the areas of need in our families, our community, our neighborhoods, and the world. The foundation of God's kingdom is love expressed as service to one another rather than a pursuit of greed, power and control.

Jesus teaches and exemplifies servant leadership – a trait that was as uncommon back then as it is now. This ought to make us think. We live in a world that is full of people who are standing on their rights when they should be like Jesus, willing to get dirty helping others. While most people are fighting to reach the top, as Christians we should be reaching for the towels. When we are tempted to think of our dignity, our social status and our rights, let us remember the picture of the Son of God, gird with a towel, kneeling at His disciples' feet, with a bucket of water.

To wash another's feet is to stoop for the good of another in fulfillment of Jesus' command to love one another as He loves us. The strange thing is that it is the person who stoops like this, like Jesus, that people in the end will honor and remember long after they have passed on. We must learn from the Master to be humble in our hearts. Dave Thomas, the late founder of Wendy's Hamburgers, once appeared in the copy of the annual report of the corporation with a mop and bucket. It was not a gag, but was done intentionally so that he could lead by example. At Wendy's a MBA does not mean a "Master of Business Administration;" it means "Mop Bucket Attitude!" Service at the lowliest level makes for great success.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 11:24-26, the Apostle Paul reminds us of what Jesus said on this night: "Do this in remembrance of me – for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again." Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are drawn back to that eventful night as we reenact this meal over and over until Jesus returns. The Lord's Supper is a link between the Lord's first coming and His second coming. We must be careful that our familiarity with this service does not let it become routine and commonplace in our worship.

The meal that we celebrate tonight is a meal of memory. Jesus is telling us – "Don't forget."

- Don't forget all that I taught you.
- Don't forget the ups and downs of this Passion Week from the shouts of "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday to the cries of "Crucify Him" on Good Friday.
- Don't forget that the disciples abandoned me and Judas betrayed me.
- Don't forget the ridicule of the mob and the beating by the Romans soldiers.
- Don't forget the nails of the cross.

- Don't forget the sins of all humanity that I carried on my shoulders to the cross.
- Don't forget the cold dark tomb.
- Don't forget the Resurrection and the hope of eternal life for all who believe.
- Don't forget that the feet for all who believe in me are not washed with water but with my blood shed on the cross for you.

But most of all, Jesus says don't forget that I did all this for you, out of love for each one of you. It was not nails that held Jesus on the cross, but love; love for you. Do this in remembrance of me and my love for you.

As we come now to partake of the sacrament of Holy Communion on this sad, but holy night, let us remember what Jesus Christ did for us out of love. Let us remember our call to servant leadership and rededicate ourselves to Jesus and this calling. Amen