

Sermon for August 2, 2009

Text: John 13:1-17

8:30am, 10am, & 10am Worship

Title: "How Can I Help?"

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The Text: John 13

¹⁻² **Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come** to leave this world to go to the Father. Having loved his dear companions, he continued to love them right to the end. It was suppertime. The Devil by now had Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, firmly in his grip, all set for the betrayal.

³⁻⁶ **Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything**, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. When he got to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Master, you wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later."

⁸ **Peter persisted, "You're not going to wash my feet—ever!"** Jesus said, "If I don't wash you, you can't be part of what I'm doing." ⁹ "Master!" said Peter. "Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!" ¹⁰⁻¹² Jesus said, "If you've had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you're clean from head to toe. My concern, you understand, is holiness, not hygiene. So now you're clean. But not every one of you." (He knew who was betraying him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you.") After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table.

¹²⁻¹⁷ **Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do.** I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.

Background

Today we continue our year-long study of the Words of Jesus, the red letter words in the Bible. Lately, we have been looking at the intimate words of Jesus, those given in more private settings and often to close friends. Today's passage is one of the most powerful in scripture, for Jesus is speaking here the night he is betrayed. These are some of his last words before his death. In this setting his actions speak powerfully before a word is said.

The setting is a small, private, borrowed banquet room in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus is gathered with his core leaders to celebrate the Passover Feast. This major annual Jewish Feast pulls every Hebrew man, woman, and child back to their roots as slaves. In Egypt, the Hebrews had been welcomed refugees and then, slowly over the years, been relegated to slavery. They were beaten, oppressed, and even had their children slaughtered. God heard their cry and sent Moses to deliver them from this bondage. Through a series of miracles, God bent the hard heart of Pharaoh and freed His people.

The last of the ten miracles or plagues was the most dramatic and terrible. Pharaoh refused to free the people even after repeated warnings and increasing displays of God's power. He would not admit that there was a God greater than himself. He was the center of everything, and all bowed to him! He would not submit to ANY other authority. This would be his undoing.

On the tenth and last plague, the Lord said to Moses in Exodus 12 for every Hebrew family to sacrifice a young unblemished lamb and put the blood from it on the doors post of each house as a sign of faith. Then he said, "...I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

Pharaoh lost his firstborn son that night and the Hebrew people gained their freedom from hundreds of years of bondage. Each year since, the Hebrew people have gathered to remember how God saved them through the shedding of innocent blood, the blood of a Lamb. God said: "...when I see the blood, I will pass over you." It is in this context that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would now offer himself to take away our sins. Our text says: **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, he now showed them the full extent of his love.** This was the night for Jesus to give the final instructions to prepare his disciples for his death and resurrection. Were they ready? Not quite.

Rubber Gloves and Toilet Bowl Brush

“How can I help?” The main point I want to highlight out of this passage is serving. Either we serve or expect others to serve us. Which are you? Do you look to serve others or do you look for others to serve you? Jesus is meeting us in this passage asking the question, “Is your purpose to serve or to be served?”

When you are young and thinking about your future, the impact you will have on the world, the tools of your trade, what do we tend to think about? Being a leader, a CEO, having a big corner office, with a large, clean desk with others taking care of the details, we have no time to give. We are important. We are valuable. People look up to us. We are served!

I think those kind of thoughts were in the minds and hearts of the first disciples as they entered the building to the Passover Feast. They had been with Jesus three years now. He had become a Hebrew superstar! People flocked from miles around to see, hear, and touch this man. The religious leaders were threatened by his popularity. They were forming unlikely alliances in order to plot his destruction. Jesus had entered the city in a parade and was welcomed by the people as a king. The disciples could feel his influence rising and taste the power that would soon be theirs as his chosen disciples. They would be in power. Others would serve them from now on. At least, that is what they thought.

As they entered the Passover Celebration, there was no servant to greet them and wash their feet. How strange! Their feet were dirty from all the travel. They would be reclining at the supper table with their feet next to each other. The smell would be unpleasant. Where is that servant? Who is going to wash our feet? I am sure they paused and waited. No one came to serve them. No one in the group offered to wash the feet instead. They all were too full of their own importance to serve. They were trapped. What would they do?

Are you and I so wrapped up in ourselves we cannot serve others? Are we too busy with all our personal routines and commitments that we cannot break away to help others? Do we have the attitude that others should always serve us? Do we find ourselves complaining about others? The food is cold. This line is too slow. I want my hair a certain way and you did not get it! Complaining is a sign that we think things should revolve around us! Ask God to show you every time you gripe about something. Ask God to show us when we believe it is all about our needs and comfort. Ask God to forgive us when that happens, so we can be free to truly love and serve. God wants us to always be asking, “How can I help?”

Let us return to our passage. When no one offered to wash their feet, all the disciples sat down with dirty feet. Jesus was watching all of this. He knew in

order for his disciples to be ready, he had to serve them again. Again our text: “³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”

What was the point of washing their feet? To get them clean? Yes, that would make for a more pleasant evening.

- Did Jesus want to embarrass them? No, he wanted them to see what they were called to do. They were to be like him (*see Philippians 2:3-11*).
- Did Peter over react? Yes, but we all would have squirmed in that situation.
- What did Jesus mean about cleaning the feet only? Many think this passage is also about forgiveness. We seek to follow God, but every day we stumble, we sin, our feet get dirty, so to speak. We need God to forgive us.
- As Jesus sits down he explains his actions. “¹⁴**Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.**”

Lessons in discipleship and leadership never stop for Jesus. This is the same one we will face again and again until we get it. We are directed to serve. We are to follow in the steps of Jesus and make it our purpose in life to serve God and others. Our daily question to God and others is, “How can I help?” We do not do this by our own power and wisdom. We do this by being connected to Jesus. A disciple of Jesus takes his or her cues from God. We wake up each morning asking, “What do you want to do today God? How can I join what you are already doing? Send your Spirit to work in and through me, please.”

Are you and I ready to serve? 1) Ask God to show you this week where you are called to serve. It may be the very place you complain the most. Go there and ask, “How can I help?” 2) Ask God to forgive you when the Holy Spirit taps you on the shoulder and shows you an attitude that is self-centered. 3) Read John 13 this week and invite God to show you how much he loves you. Say, “God, help me to experience your love and forgiveness today in a deep way.” 4) And finally, each night write down three ways God has blessed you as you served others. The promise from Jesus is that as you serve, you will be blessed. Write it down and close out each day thanking God for the blessings in your life! **“How can I help?” This is the way you and I were designed to live!**