

## He Came to Serve

John 13:1-17

Maundy Thursday, April 17, 2014

*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, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and 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 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!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to 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 also should 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.*

Grace, mercy, and peace from the One who came to serve, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

On this Maundy Thursday, Christians all over the world are gathered to worship our Savior and to reflect on the events of the eve of Christ's crucifixion. Millions of believers will hear sermon messages on the institution of the Lord's Supper. However, tonight, we are going to take a different course. Tonight, we are going to take a close look at Jesus' act of selfless, humble service.

Verse one tells us that: *Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world.* Let that sink into your brain. Jesus knew that in just a few hours he was going to be arrested, tortured, and suffocate to death on a cross.

If you were in that position, what would you be doing? Would you be stooping to the lowest possible service to show your loved ones how much you love them? Would your thoughts be all about others or all about yourself? According to our reading, during this very serious time, Jesus' only thought was to show his disciples *"the full extent of his love."*

That's quite remarkable, isn't it? Knowing what his immediate future held, Jesus could only think of his disciples. But that isn't the only mind-boggling thing in the

opening verses of this text. Let's look at verse three: *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.*

Jesus knew more than just the details of his suffering and death. Jesus knew the Father had given all things over to him. That means Jesus was number one, king of the hill, the alpha male. All things were now under his control. That also means it was within his power to stop what was going to happen during the next 24 hours. Jesus knew who he was, where he came from, and where he was going. Jesus fully understood he was the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and he let all things proceed according to the Father's plan.

You probably don't find all that too shocking. Jesus was still God. Of course he knew all these things. And that's true. The shock comes in verses four and five. *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.*

See if you can wrap your mind around this. Someone who knows he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords has just laid his clothing aside and is washing the dirty feet of sinful men. The master has become the slave. The highest has just taken the place of the lowest. Jesus even washed the feet of the one who was about to betray him.

Listen to Jesus: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Mt 20:28).

Again: *The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves"*

(Lk 22:26-27).

This brings us to Peter and his misunderstanding. It would seem Peter was disturbed by the reversal of roles. He had trouble visualizing Jesus serving him. Peter didn't know this act of humble service was foreshadowing the humble service that would take place very soon.

Jesus told Peter: *Unless I wash you, you have no part with me* (Jn 13:8). In other words, unless Jesus washed Peter in the atoning blood of his sacrifice, there couldn't be a real relationship between Peter and Jesus. Unless Jesus washes us in his cleansing blood, we have no relationship with Jesus.

Like Peter, we have been washed clean by Christ's sacrifice. Is there anything to do beyond that? Yes. Jesus continues: *A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean* (Jn 13:10). Walking through the dusty deserts and cities of Israel left even a clean person with dirty feet.

When we became blood-bought believers, we became clean. But as we walk through this sin-dusty world we pick up some of the pollution of the world. We dirty our feet with the sins of this world. That doesn't destroy our relationship with Jesus, but it does mean we need a

spiritual foot washing. We need to daily go to Jesus and confess our sins. We need a daily cleansing.

Later, Peter would realize the great and humble service Jesus had done for him. In his first epistle, Peter writes: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God"* (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18).

This is wonderful news. Jesus performed the lowest act of service for us in order to secure our salvation. The question at hand is, "What are the implications of Jesus' service for us?" In the reading we hear Jesus say: *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"* (Jn 13:15-16).

No servant is greater than his master. Let's look at that. Jesus is our Master. We are his servants. If Jesus, our Master, stooped to perform the lowest act of service, where does that leave us? Can we claim that any act of service is beneath us? Can we rightly say we won't put others ahead of ourselves?

A servant of Jesus is more than just a believer. A servant of our Master is exactly that – a servant – a slave. That brings up four important points about being a servant of Jesus.

- 1) A servant of Jesus does not act on his own. He does not just do the things he feels like doing.

2) A servant of Jesus has no rights of his own. He has surrendered all his rights to his Master.

3) A servant of Jesus is at the beckon call of his Master so at any moment he can be called on to do the Master's will.

4) A servant of Jesus exists solely to serve his Master and only his Master.

That covers the service we servants offer to the Master. However, that's not all. Jesus tells us that he set an example for us. He tells us to do likewise – not literally washing each others' feet – but performing humble acts of service for other people. That brings up three important points about serving others.

1) When we engage in acts of service to other people, we never do it with the intention of gaining some kind of rank or position. Service is not a competition, it's a thank offering to God.

2) When we serve others, there is no act of service that is beneath us. We must keep in mind that we follow a Master who washed the dirty feet of his disciples.

3) Our service to others covers both their physical and spiritual needs. Telling a hungry man Jesus loves him is good, but it does nothing to satisfy his hunger. As I said on Palm Sunday, "Don't tell them Jesus loves them until you're ready to love them, too."

Verse 17 tells us there is an earthly reward for being a devoted servant of Christ. Jesus says: *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* The word we translate as "blessed" can be translated as "happy." So, let's change the translation: *Now that you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.* Jesus tells us that true happiness lies in service – service to him as our Master and service to others in the name of our Master.

This Maundy Thursday Jesus teaches us what service is all about. It's not about being recognized. It's not about position or status. To serve Jesus and others, as Jesus served us, our service must be about forgiveness, humility, obedience, and self-sacrifice.