

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Tonight, instead of focusing on the institution of the Lord’s Supper, we look at the “other” Maundy Thursday activity - where Jesus washed His disciples feet. Some churches make a big deal of it, where the Pastor wraps a big towel around Himself and takes to washing the feet of the congregation, or of a chosen few who represent the congregation. They do this because Jesus commanded His disciples in verse 15, “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did so you.” We want to meditate on this lesson and discover Jesus' Foot-Washing Humility and His Self-Giving Love.

Now, I have no problem with taking up a towel and washing your feet, if that is what you want, but you would probably just feel silly, and it would be another one of those things that the church does that doesn't really make any sense. The lesson here is not about pedal hygiene. The lesson is about humility and love. We know it is about love because the first verse says so. “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” What Jesus does here is part of loving His disciples to the end. But everything He did from that moment until He had risen from the dead and showed Himself alive to the Twelve was done as part of loving them to the end. Our salvation was about His love, not our worthiness, in the first place.

The foot-washing was about humility. You see, this foot-washing was a custom of that time and that place. It was normally done for guests by a servant. In the hot, arid regions of Judea, where people walked barefoot or with sandals on, a cool washing of the feet was powerfully refreshing, and it was considered at that time to be a wonderful courtesy from host to guest. There was no Law. It was just a custom. It was a courtesy which to deny or forget was simply rude.

The telling point is that a servant, a person of no recognized status was normally the one to perform the actual washing.

Jesus chose to perform it Himself. He took the position of the servant deliberately. It was as if to say, "there is no task too humble for me to do." Many of us have no problem stooping to do things we ought to regard as beneath the people of God, or beneath us personally. We can excuse any sin. But Jesus wasn't excusing wrong, He was demonstrating for the disciples, and for us, that there is no position of privilege in the church. If there is, there is something wrong. Jesus - our Lord and Master, and our God - was not above stooping to the most menial of tasks.

Jesus explained His action to them in verses 12 through 15. "And so, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said so them, 'Do you know what I have done so you?' Jesus had to ask because they might have mistaken it for simple foot-washing too. What He meant was, 'Do you know what it means?'

But He didn't depend on them to understand. He knew that they would not. So, He explained. "You call Me the Teacher and the Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought so wash one another's feet." Back then, the teacher was the most important person for the student. The students lived to serve the teacher. The greatest hope anyone could have is that they could be as good, as learned, as disciplined as the teacher one day.

The title, the Lord, was even stronger. Politically, it meant He was the leader, with the right to rule and to be served. If He was not above this servant's task, how could the followers consider themselves above any task that they might need to do for one another? The answer is,

they could not. When Jesus said that they should wash each other's feet also, He didn't mean that they should carry buckets and towels and wash feet, literally. He meant that they should be humble, never too good or too important to do anything that any Christian might need to do, or might need done.

"For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you." This word of Jesus should be the answer to every need of the church. If we did not consider ourselves greater than the Master, more deserving of respect, we could not look down our nose at any task which was needed. Unfortunately, that is not always the case, is it? "Truly, truly, I say so you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him." If Jesus could wash feet, there is precious little we can honestly be too good to stoop down and do. If the Son of God was not above the work of a slave, those who claim to be His people can hardly be too important or respectable to take the time or spend the effort to do anything that is needed in the Church. That willingness to serve is only the echo of the foot-washing humility of Jesus. Jesus then said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." It is not simply enough to nod your head piously as I preach about it. The blessedness of the thing comes from the doing of it - from echoing the humility of our Lord, and His love.

Jesus gave Himself for us, to purchase our forgiveness at the price of His suffering and death on the cross. He also taught us how we are to live - in foot-washing service, loving one another as he has loved us. And look at the humility of our Lord, He washed even the feet of Judas, who Jesus knew was about to betray Him into death. What kind of humility, and great self-giving love that act of humble and loving service must have required. And Jesus holds this lesson out to us on the night on which He was betrayed as an example that He would have us follow.

"A Foot-washing mentality" John 13:1-15 Maundy Thursday 2021

There is nothing that God calls on us to do about which we can rightly say, "Oh no, not me!" Foot-washing humility before one another, and self-giving love toward one another!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.