

Servants are (or should be) Everywhere

John 13:1, 3-5, 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.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ 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. 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. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

This is the word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

Leader: Let us join now in uniting our faith in these historic words:

People: We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,

Leader: maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

People: We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,

Leader: God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

People: For us and our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

Leader: On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his Kingdom will have no end.

People: We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

Leader: who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

People: We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The last week of Jesus' life was filled with many moments and much meaning. It seemed to start at the table with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus on Saturday evening. Now, today – the passage is from another table – on Thursday evening – in the upper room.

For us to understand this passage fully – we have to let go of what we think we know. We have to get out of our minds the famous Leonardo Da Vinci painting of the Last Supper [**da vinci**], with everyone sitting on one side of the table. Da Vinci was a masterful artist, but he was a weak theologian. When I look at it – it always seems to me that Jesus had just announced: “Everyone who wants to be in the picture get on this side of the table!” It reminds me of old TV shows [**Families 1**]. It made for good camera angles – but not quite natural. Or tv shows where we know 4 people live in the house but 3 are at the table with one standing [**golden 1**] or on other occasions – one on a stool [**golden 2**].

But that is not how they sat at table that evening. They arranged themselves around a low, [**triclinium last supper 1**] U-shaped table called a triclinium, and they reclined on their left elbows, their legs and feet sticking out diagonally from the table.

It was this type table that Jesus refers to along the way when he tells stories. And when he gives the advice that we should take the lower seat so that we could be invited to move higher. Because every seat means something in the social structure. We don't know where everyone was sitting, but we know a few. [last supper triclinium 2] Jesus is seated in the seat of the host. John and Judas are seated in the places of honor. Beyond Judas – each seat would go lower and lower until you reach the last seat where we find Peter. He is in the Servant Seat.

Luke tells us that when the disciples came into the room – they were arguing over who was the greatest. So, of course, no one stops to wash another's feet.

The washing of feet was part of hospitality but was also a necessity. It was not a pleasant task. People went barefoot or they wore sandals and walked everywhere in dust and dirt and more. So, the task of washing the feet of guests was usually relegated to the person of the lowest rank. Since none of the disciples felt they fit that description they all had come to the table with unwashed feet.

Instead of serving one another, the disciples were were competing for the best seats in the house.

How could the master teach them that greatness comes through service? How could he teach them that it is in laying down your life that you will find it? He did it with this astounding object lesson. He took off his outer garments, wrapped a towel around his waist and began washing his disciples' feet. The Lord of all the universe humbled himself before his disciples and took on the role of the humblest servant. What an example he gave his disciples. What an example he gave to us.

M. Scott Peck says that the scene of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples stands out as one of the most significant events of Jesus' life: "Until that moment the whole point of things had been for someone to get on top, and once he had gotten on top to stay on top or else attempt to get farther up. But here this man already on top--who was rabbi, teacher, master--suddenly got down on the bottom and began to wash the feet of his followers. In that one act Jesus symbolically overturned the whole social order. Hardly comprehending what was happening, even his own disciples were almost horrified by his behavior."

In that one amazingly rebellious act Jesus demonstrated that Christian greatness is not determined by position, or power, or education or titles or visibility. **Christian greatness is determined by the willingness to meet the need of the moment with a deed of service.**

The legendary actress Mae West has given us many memorable quotes. Things like: “Between two evils, I always pick the one I never tried before” and, “Any time you’ve got nothing to do and lots of time to do it come on up.” Her most revealing quote is “I never loved another person the way I loved myself.”

It’s easy to let your ego take over in life.

Gene Wilkes, in his book, *Jesus on Leadership*, says, “Jesus did not come to gain a place of power. He did not come to defeat his human enemies. He did not come to overthrow an unjust government. Jesus came to show us the heart of God. His entire message and ministry on earth was to show selfish, power-hungry people like you and me what love looks like. As he knelt before Judas, Jesus showed us a love that no human can conceive on his own: a love that is brutally honest about what is going on but still kneels before us to lay down his life so we can

be free from the sin that infects us. Jesus loves you as he loved Judas. If you miss that, you have missed eternal life.”

The service and servanthood that led Jesus to kneel down and wash his disciples’ feet is an example to all of us.

One of the most obvious examples of the power of servanthood was a young Albanian girl named Agnes. At the age of 18 Agnes gave in to the calling she felt in her life – and she became a nun.

When she announced her intention to enter a convent to her brother who was a soldier could NOT believe it. His sister was vivacious and engaging. How could she become a nun? Agnes had the perfect answer for him. She said that she knew he was proud as a soldier to be serving a king who ruled over a few million subjects. She, on the other hand, would be serving the King of the entire world. So, Agnes entered a convent where she remained for 17 years.

In 1948, after 17 years living this cloistered life, Agnes decided to walk away from the convent taking nothing with her except three Saris to go over her white habit. She left the convent and went into the street to serve the least and the lowest. She said she was called to care for the

sick, the poor, the dying, and the dispossessed, to show them the love that God had for them. She spent the rest of her life living out that calling. And she did it all with a beautiful smile. We know Agnes, of course, as Mother Teresa.

She was the perfect example of the kind of greatness Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once talked about: “Everybody can be great,” he said, “because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve . . . You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”

How can you serve? Where can you serve? Who can you serve? Jesus shows us that it can start in the simplest way – the most obvious way. Jesus was willing to meet the need with a deed of service? Are you?

It could be places of service like serving as a greeter or usher. Singing in the choir or praise band. It could be in volunteering with the food pantry or leading a small group. It could be in teaching Sunday school or helping with the many mission opportunities.

At home, at work, at school, with family, with friends, you can probably see places of need every day. But you have to be willing to respond with a deed of service.

Jesus said, “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 blessed if you do them.”

On his final week of life and ministry – Jesus gave us this example of service and servanthood – and said that we need to follow the example he as set.