

‘The example of Jesus’ love’

A servant received a call from his mother-in-law asking him to come home over for the weekend and so, the servant went to his boss and asked for a day off. The man of the house said, ‘we’re very busy this weekend and I’m sorry, but I can’t give you a day off.’ To which the servant replied, ‘thanks, I knew I could count on you.’

As Christians we never get time off from being a servant, we’re continually serving the Lord and others whenever and wherever we can. We serve our spouses every day, we serve our children every day, we serve our bosses every day when we’re at work. As servants of Christ, we serve all the time and continuously look to serve others whenever and wherever we can.

Today, I’ve been asked to speak from **John 13:1-17** where we find an example of Jesus’ love for others. **John 13-19** deal with the final week in the earthly life of Jesus and we see two significant actions in **John 13:1-30**. He washes His disciples’ feet as an object lesson in love and humility and, He gives Judas a chance to rethink what he’s about to do and then He tells Judas to do what he thinks he needs to do quickly. And its then, that Jesus sets into motion the chain of events which led to His death.

And so loved ones, if we ever want to know what Jesus’ love looks like, this is one of many texts we could go to, but here in **John 13** we find Jesus’ love in action. **John 13:1-2** “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. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.”

Make no mistake about it, He loved the men He had spent the last three years training, and now He’s going to use this opportunity to show them the full extent of His love and His humility. And when I say, He loved the men, I mean all of them, including Judas. Jesus treated Judas the same as the other eleven, if He didn’t the disciples would have known something was up. And even though Judas already knew what he was going to do, Jesus still loved him.

Remember that he had just shown his true colours as a materialist by being guilty of stealing. **John 12:3-6** “But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

Jesus already knew what Judas was like, but He still loved him. Now Judas had the opportunity to earn some extra money by selling Jesus to the Sanhedrin. And so, he decides that the time is right, but **why now?** Maybe he thought if he didn’t act now, someone else will get the thirty pieces of silver. But whatever the reason to act now was, his decision to sell out Jesus was already made. And whilst Judas made the decision to serve money, Jesus made the decision to serve His disciples.

John 13:3-5 “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.”

Jesus had all assurance that His objectives were to be reached, and He now needed to show the disciples the way of humility, not arrogance. Now feet washing wasn’t just a New Testament practice, it was practiced in Old testament times too.

Remember when Abraham had three visitors back in Genesis 18? Abraham said to them in **Genesis 18:3-4** “If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.” **Remember when David was plotting to cover up his sin with Bathsheba?** He said to Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, in **2 Samuel 11:8** “Go down to your house and wash your feet.”

In other words, Jesus wasn’t instituting a new practice as some people believe today. Back in Bible times, people only wore sandals, and it was practiced because the roads were unsurfaced and uncleaned. In summer time there would be dust everywhere, and in the winter, there would be mud everywhere. But feet washing was looked upon as the lowliest of all services.

Remember when an unclean woman walked into the courtyard of Simon's house and Simon wasn't very happy about her being there? After sharing a parable with Simon about the debtors, Jesus says to Simon, in **Luke 7:44** "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair." In other words, Simon being the host, should have acted like the servant, but he didn't. And in comes this unclean woman whom Jesus praises as being a true servant.

Notice that John mentions the 'outer clothing' in **John 13:4+12**. You see, it was customary that the slave who washed his master's feet, removed both the outer cloak and the inner tunic. And so, you basically were left wearing a loincloth. But feet washing was an essential social requirement and anyone who was wealthy enough, would have a servant who would carry out this service.

Now I'm pretty sure up to this point in time, the disciples would have taken turns to wash each other's feet. But as we shall see in a moment, here on this occasion, they weren't willing to do it. **Why is that?** Because as we see over and over again in Scriptures, whenever Jesus spoke about His upcoming death, but the disciples didn't want to listen. And the reason, they didn't want to listen is because their minds are on something else.

Luke 22:24 "A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest." They were too busy thinking about themselves and arguing about who's going to be the greatest. Imagine how Jesus must have felt, imagine how frustrated with His disciples He must have been. Here is Jesus preparing to go to the cross to die for all of mankind and all they could think about who was going to take over from Jesus when He goes.

You see, feet washing was proof of being a true servant, and so Jesus, fully understanding His Deity as well as His imminent death and return to God, becomes that lowly servant. And He washes and dries the feet of those around Him, using the towel wrapped around His waist. Think about this for a moment, here's the Creator of the universe, the perfecter and author of our faith washing feet. The lowest servant's role is taken on by God Himself.

Philippians 2:5-7 "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

Paul says, God, in the form of Jesus, 'made Himself nothing', it was His choice and He chose to serve, rather than being served. **Why do you think we sing, 'make me a servant Lord, make me like you'?** We sing it but the truth is, we struggle with the concept of being a servant. We're living in a world where most people want to be served and we come along and say, 'no! I want to be like Jesus, I want to do the serving'.

And loved ones, I've personally seen this congregation grow, big time in terms of being servants. I'm not saying you weren't servants before, I'm saying it's becoming more and more visible. One simple example of this is when you take the time to get out there on the streets and feed the homeless. And like everyone else, your busy and got other things you could be doing, but you chose to get out there and do it, that's being a servant.

And so, Jesus is finished washing and drying His disciple's feet and then He turns to Peter who says to Jesus. **John 13:6-9** "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 eventually works his way around to Peter and **don't you just love him?** We know Peter had a strong tendency to put his foot in his mouth without thinking of the potential consequences. And when Jesus wants to wash Peter's feet, Peter protests and says, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Now on the surface this may have sounded kind of weird to Peter that His master wants to wash His servant's feet.

But Peter should have known that Jesus was teaching them an object lesson using their feet. And even if he didn't understand the lesson, it was simple enough and clear enough, that Jesus wasn't involved in a foot cleaning session for the fun of it. You see, Peter immediately shows that he doesn't appreciate the significance of what Jesus is doing by his violent protest.

And if this tells us anything about Peter, it shows us Peter's character, which was curious blend of humility and arrogance. Yes, he was humble because he didn't want Jesus to wash his feet, but he was also arrogant. Now notice how Peter's attitude changed when Jesus says to him, 'Unless I wash you, you will not share with me'.

Look at Peter's response, **'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!'** Clearly Peter was a very unstable man, he had just told his Master that He, Jesus was doing too much. Now he tells Him that He isn't doing enough! One moment he courageously walks on the sea, the next moment he is pleading, **'Lord, save me!'** **Matthew 14:28-30**. He confesses that Jesus is **'the Christ, the Son of the living God,'** **Matthew 16:16**, then soon after he dares to rebuke His Master, by saying, **"Never, Lord!"** **"This shall never happen to you!"** **Matthew 16:22**. In the Upper Room, he declares that he would rather die than deny Jesus, but soon he will deny him three times. **John 18:25-27**.

But one thing we shouldn't miss out on here is that Peter, whenever he spoke or acted out of turn, his heart was always in the right place. Jesus says to him, Peter, **'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand'**. There's no denying Peter's love for Jesus, even here in **John 13** he seems to be saying, **'I want to belong to you completely'** not just my feet, but all of me, Lord.

He was impulsive and unreliable, but in him, grace gradually won the victory and made him the man Jesus wanted him to be. He seems so insistent that Jesus will not clean his feet until Jesus tells him his options, then he swings around to the opposite extreme and wants his whole body washed. And loved ones Peter had to learn to grow into the person that Jesus wanted him to be. And as Christians we need to be patient with ourselves and each other, to allow ourselves and others to grow into the kind of people that Jesus wants us to be.

You see, the lesson Jesus is teaching them isn't about bodily cleanliness, it's about spiritual humility. And it's a lesson we all must learn, especially those who are in leadership positions within the church. The leaders of the church must lead by example, and in humility, with all love and compassion. Peter didn't feel worthy of having his feet cleaned by the Lord, and he was well justified for this idea.

But the reality is, none of us deserved or still do deserve redemption, but God's love for us exceeds His hate for sin. And when you think about it, we must be so precious in the eyes of God, or He would never have sent His Son to die on our behalf in the first place.

And so, Jesus continues and says in **John 13:10-11** **"Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their 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 everyone was clean."

Jesus gives an everyday example, of a man going to a feast, the first thing he does is bathes completely at home. Then when he arrives at the feast, only his feet would be washed. And when he says to the disciples, **'you are clean'**, He's speaking of being spiritually clean. But notice that Jesus also said, **'though not every one of you'**. Now He's obviously speaking about Judas and remember that Judas had already made a bargain with the Sanhedrin to betray Jesus by this time.

And so, Jesus has reassured Peter and the others that they are now clean but then He turns His attention to one of the number who isn't. Put yourself in that room right now, imagine the disciples wondering who Jesus is referring too. Imagine what was going on in Judas's heart, because he would have understood who Jesus was talking about. You see, Judas may have had a bath, but he could never wash away the spiritual dirt he had allowed and was now allowing to accumulate within him.

And remember what I said earlier, Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray Him, but He still washed Judas's feet. If that were you and I, we would be saying, **'no way buddy, I know you're a thief, I know you're going to sell me out, I'm not washing your feet!'** But Jesus knowing all these things still washed his feet, **why?** Because He loved him.

You see, I'm convinced that none of us really know we are servants until we get treated like one. Oh, we're happy to serve when its convenient for us and when we really want to serve. Loved ones, agape love isn't a mere emotional response to someone we like or something we want to do. It's a deliberate act of the will, a determination to do good to others, whether we want to or not, no matter how badly they treat us.

John 13:12-16 **"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."**

Jesus completed the task of washing the rest of the disciple's feet and notice that no one else commented on the action. They understand what happened, they knew what He had done, but I don't think they appreciated its spiritual significance. Jesus joins them at the table and started to discuss what's just happened, and He points out to them the relationship between them, and Jesus. Jesus is not only their Teacher, He is also their Lord. The point is simply this, if He, as their Teacher and Lord had lovingly served them, they ought to lovingly serve one another.

John 13:17 "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." In man's view of things, you have many people at the bottom of a ladder in a company, family or even a church. But here Jesus shows His disapproval of such views by washing the feet of the disciples. He shows the need for the leaders, as Jesus truly was, to be servants to the masses.

Now loved ones, this is radical teaching, this goes against everything the world teaches us about being successful. Let show share with you a diagram of what I'm talking about.

Man's ladder
 Managing director.
 Area managers
 Office managers
 Office workers
 Tea women,
 Cleaners
 Messengers etc.

This is man's view of the road to success, many are at the bottom of the ladder and all are trying to get up it and the man at the top is served by those below him. Now looks at Jesus' way to be successful.

Jesus' ladder
 Non-Christians
 Congregation
 Teachers
 Deacons
 Elders
 Jesus Christ

This is Jesus' view of the same ladder, He taught the need to accept our place at the top, but we need to serve others to get down the ladder. Jesus says, there's nothing wrong with wanting to be great in His kingdom, but you must start from the top and work your way down by serving others. In other words, you become more like Christ, the more you serve others.

Matthew 20:25-28 "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

God in the flesh came to serve, that's an incredible thought, *isn't it?* And notice that serving includes sacrifice. He's telling them in His kingdom, true greatness is measured by the yardstick of sacrificial loving service. **Galatians 5:13** "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love".

One day a man said to God, 'God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.' God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man's mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly.

They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they couldn't get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, 'You have seen Hell.' Behind the second door, the room appeared the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man's mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. The man said, 'I don't understand.' God smiled. 'It is simple', He said, 'love only requires one skill. These people learned early on to share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves.'

Loved ones, we don't become Christians just to be saved, we become Christians to serve. In fact Christians are much like tennis layers, you can't participate unless you're willing to serve. And on judgment day going is either going to say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Matthew 25:23 Or He will say, 'Well'!