

13 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.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. **3** 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.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

10 Jesus answered, "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." **11** For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 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.

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Do you know who I am?

There is a story about a flight canceled due to bad weather. Every passenger is in line being rerouted when someone steps to the front and demands immediate attention by barking orders at the customer service representative. The representative responds by pointing to the line, "Get in line and we will be with you as fast as we can." But he didn't want anything to do with a line, "Don't you know who I am?" With patience dwindling the service rep picks up the speaker phone and asks anyone who may know to step forward and let this man know who he is. The point was taken. Nobody knows and nobody cares especially when he acts like the most important person in the room.

Jesus knew who he was. He actually is the most important person in the room - but he doesn't act like it. He doesn't preach down to his disciples. He doesn't shame them but instead he stoops to serve. Even in the last hours of his life he loved them to the very end even when he knew he didn't have much time left but rather than focus on his needs he helps his disciples understand who they are.

Jesus not only teaches them who they are but he teaches us who we are. We are not the most important person in the room. Jesus tells us you are not as important as you think but you are loved more than you imagine. You are those whom God saves, those washed and made clean by the blood of the lamb, those who have been served by God. That is who you are.

But at this point the disciples thought they were someone special. They've been with Jesus for some time now. They are the apostles. The twelve. They've seen his miracles. The times are exciting and they are invited to a private party with Jesus himself. And now Jesus is speaking about his coming kingdom and they are thinking about who will sit at the right and left when he finally arrives. So they argue about who is the most important person in the room.

But something is missing. In fact the meal had already started but there was no servant to wash feet. A Rabbi would never ask a student to wash feet. The cultural boundaries were clearly defined. Guest were not to wash their own feet. Not even Jewish slaves were required to wash feet but only those on the bottom rung of Gentiles washed feet. But no one was around and maybe they were just waiting for a volunteer like a group waiting to see who will reach for the bill first. Maybe Matthew, since he was the tax collector. But just then the Master himself gets up, lays down his cloak and takes up a towel to wash their feet.

Jesus does not have in mind to shame them but to show them their sin and help them realize what he was going to do for them in just a short time. Peter takes issue, "You are going to wash my feet?" Upset. This is embarrassing. You can't wash my feet. Don't you know who you are? I would die for you. Peter rejects Jesus as he is and demands a different god, one who is dignified and glorified. He is willing to die for glory but fighting for a towel is below him. A God cleaning feet is unthinkable. Let him be seated on his throne, holding all power. Let us kneel. But Jesus knew he he was and why he had come. He is Master and Lord. He is the King who has come to serve.

But we too may think God shouldn't get down on his hands and knees to serve us. We should serve him. He is someone special. We need to wash his feet. God needs us to do

something for him. Often the reason we want him to be special is because we want to be special. Connected to Jesus and part of an inner circle. But just then Jesus gets up to serve us and Peter's pride becomes ours.

Like Peter, our pride may get in the way of allowing God to serve us. Pride makes us believe that our sins aren't that bad and we aren't in need of forgiveness. I have cleaned up my life. I don't need God's help. Pride makes us believe that we are something that we are not - (The most important person in the room). It's even worse when our pride looks down on others in the room and demands they serve me. They should. We need more volunteers. It's time for someone else to take over... That pride may even keep us from washing the feet of others.

While God is important and we should serve him - that's not why he has come. Christianity is not about our doing for God what pagans do for their gods but what God has done for us. Islam demands you die for god but in Christianity, God dies for us. That's why we want to serve him. He is our Master. He is our God. He comes to serve us.

Jesus knows who he is and yet he serves. He lays down his cloak. He takes up a towel. Jesus gives them an example of what he will do for them in just a few hours time. What Peter doesn't understand is that if he thinks washing his feet is too much for him just wait until he lays down his life and takes up the sin, guilt, and shame of Peter. Just wait for the moment when his righteous robes aren't just set aside they are striped from his back and gambled away. Just wait for the time when Jesus exchanges his righteous robes for a soiled rag to clean not just our feet but our souls.

It's the great exchange. Jesus righteousness for our filth. All of this is his work for us. God serves us. In Scripture Jesus serves us. Worship is known as the divine service. I don't necessarily like calling worship: service, because I feel like it gives the wrong idea of who is serving who. Divine Service is a bit better because it reminds us that God comes to serve us. In confession and absolution, in the Word and Sacrament he comes down to clean and wash your filthy feet, your souls.

In Jesus' kingdom, the king serves us and needs nothing from us. Just like Peter, we sinfully think that Jesus needs us to wash His feet but in reality the church is a gathering of flawed, sinful people, who will never be perfect this side of heaven. Jesus, the king of the universe, gave Himself in love for us. Jesus washes our sins away in baptism. Jesus gives us His very body and blood to drink. Jesus does not say, "Now that I've done all this for you, you better give me glory." We realize that what we do for God is of much less importance than what he has done for us.

Jesus tells us to take the joy in our hearts and direct it toward the good of our neighbor. Our neighbor needs our good works, Jesus does not. That doesn't mean go out and wash the feet of your neighbors or those in need. That imagery is long gone and accomplishes nothing unless you're hosting a diabetic foot care clinic. Jesus isn't establishing a new sacrament but he's pointing us to himself and instructing us to love just as we have been loved.

He loved us even when we thought we were the most important person in the room. He loves us even though we aren't the most important person in the room. Then he treats us as if we were the most important person in the room. The church will continue on even without me. Don't think, "Others need to step up and do more." Instead do what God has placed in your heart to do. If you can't continue on. It's okay to stop. But, *Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)*. Be a faithful husband or wife, put the needs of your loved one ahead of your own. Be a responsible parent to your children. Be an honest worker doing your job to the best of your ability. Be a good neighbor to all whom God has placed in your path. As opportunity permits feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger. Visit the sick and care for the needy.

Don't argue about being the greatest because God has stooped to serve you. You don't need to cut in front of anyone else and demand immediate attention. Jesus treats everyone of us as if we were the most important person in the room. Allow yourself to be served by the Lamb of God who goes to the cross without complaint.

He certainly loved you to the end and still does. He serves you in scripture, sermon, word, and sacrament. He bends down to wash our souls even when we've betrayed him. He still lays down his righteous robe for us and then takes up our soiled rags in service to us. He still treats us as if we are the most important people on earth.