

“Serving the Gospel”

John 13:12-20

Introduction

You've probably all had the experience at one time or another where we've gone out to eat only to be disappointed – not because the food wasn't any good, but because the dishes were grimy, the tables greasy and the atmosphere unpleasant. It doesn't take much in such a setting for us to lose our appetites. Well, quite a few years ago Jenny and I had the opposite experience. We had a coupon for a real fancy restaurant in Indianapolis. This was a more upscale place than I think we'd ever been to and consequently I had great expectations. The candle light was nice and the fancy table clothes and china were OK, but as near as I could tell all the chef's effort was spent in making the food look pretty on the plate. Everything was carefully arranged, color coordinated, decorated with fancy swirling sauce. It wasn't a meal. It was an art project. Problem was there was hardly anything there to eat (I was thinking “nice steak, bake potato, good salad”). I got a little splash of unique potato, a small portion of meat and some sprigs of something green. And what was there was mediocre in taste. I left the restaurant thinking that the packaging was nice but there wasn't much substance. So this restaurant thing can go either way – substance but no packaging; or presentation but no substance.

As we look at our passage this morning, we are going to see that when it comes to the ministry of the gospel, Christ is concerned with both - not

only the substance but also the presentation. In other words, we are clearly called to feeding the truth of the gospel to all who will listen, but we are to do it with humility, service and love. Christ is concerned about the truth. We cannot compromise the message of the gospel. He is also concerned about the message of our life and how we interact with those around us. It's not an "either or" proposition. In the washing of His disciple's feet we see both what we are to do and how we are to do it.

[John 13:12-20]

Jesus is hours from death. In these precious hours that are left He imparts to His disciples invaluable teaching. But the teaching is designed, not to build their intellect but to change their lives. Look at verse 17. Here's a good operating verse for every man or woman of God. *If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.* Your happiness and your fruitfulness as a person are directly connected with your application of the truths of Christ. Now, in the context of Jesus washing the disciple's feet, He clearly is preparing them for action. So this morning we want to try and understand the point Jesus was teaching and application He was leading them to through the act of washing their feet.

I. An Authority to Act.

After Jesus was done washing their feet, He put His outer garments back on, sat down at the table and asked them a question. *Do you know what I have done to you?*

Two weeks ago, we studied the meaning behind the act of this foot washing. We saw that Jesus was not instituting a new sacrament, but

illustrating a spiritual truth. He was demonstrating that He has the power and ability to cleanse people from their sins. But upon what authority did Jesus do this thing?

He points to two things about Himself to establish this authority. 1. He is the Teacher. That's another way of saying that He is the truth. Jesus stands above every other teacher. What He told the disciples was absolutely reliable. 2 He is the Lord. The idea here is Master and King. Christ has an authority given to Him from His father in heaven. With that authority came power to fulfill His mission. And it was that mission that was best illustrated by washing their feet. Only He could wash a man's soul. Only He could take away sin and guilt.

Maybe this is a good time to ask yourself the question, *Upon what authority are your sins taken away?* If your answer is that you are counting on the fact that your sins aren't all that bad, or that God will overlook them because He wouldn't judge you, or that surely you've done enough good to counteract your bad – then you've got it all wrong. Your sins can only be forgiven if the Teacher and Lord – the One with the truth and power – takes away your sin by His work on the cross.

And so, when Jesus asks the question, *do you know what I have done to you?*, we see Him operating as the Master teacher. And when we hear declare that they are clean already and then send them out, we see Him operating as the Lord who directs our steps and forgives our sin.

II. An Example to Heed.

Imagine how difficult it must have been for these disciples to watch Jesus wash their feet. They knew His character. They knew He was the Lord.

And yet here He was washing *their* feet. When He was done, the full impact of what they'd just witnessed and experienced must have still been sinking in. That's when He said to them, *For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.* What was the example? Three things are easy to see.

1. He humbled Himself.

Here is God in the flesh. Here is the creator of the heavens and the earth. Here is the One who is the beginning and the end, the light of the world, the sinless One. The one to whom is due all honor and glory and majesty and worship. And what has He done? Rather than demanding that they wash His feet and serve Him the meal and wait on His every need, He humbled Himself by washing their feet.

Is there any task that is beneath you? Is there anything that God might ask you to do to which you could rightly reply, *let someone else do that? It is below my dignity.* If we are going to follow His example then we must be prepared and ready to do the lowliest tasks, the least recognized and praised jobs, the most neglected and avoided responsibilities. Christ has shown us the nature of true humility. It's not giving up who you are, but rather giving yourself up for another.

2. He met real needs.

If we are to follow His example then we must learn to serve. Humility must have a focus. It's not humility for the sake of recognition – the Pharisees went unshaven and fasted so that men would praise them. Jesus' humility led him to serve those around Him.

Can you see the needs behind the outward appearance of men? Can you see the brokenness behind the sinfulness of men? Are you willing to

humble yourself in order to serve another so that they can draw nearer to Christ?

3. He loved them.

Everything Jesus did on this occasion was driven by His love for these men. It was love that caused Him to take up the basin of water. It was love that led him to wash away their dirt. Love will always lead to humility and service.

And so we must learn that not only is the message we carry of vital importance, but the vessel we carry it in is also significant. Never should we rationalize away our pride and arrogance and gruff approach by saying that *at least I told them the truth*. We are to speak the truth in love. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. So get your hands dirty in helping people. Be willing to humble yourself and do the hard work of serving. This is the example Christ gave us.

- An authority to Act
- An example to Heed

III. A Mission to Fulfill.

In verse 14 Jesus tells the disciples what He wants them to do. *If I then, the Lord and the Teacher washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* If this is not a call to actual foot washing, then what is it?

1. As we've already seen, it is a general call to being a servant. How willing are you to serve the needs of others? We've had ample opportunities lately for this. I am thankful to God for your ready hands and willing hearts. God will never give us more to do than we are able.

2. It is a call to cleanse the sins of others. Now remember, we do this on borrowed authority. We have no power to take away another's sins. But

we do have the authority of Christ. He is here giving us the message of the gospel to serve to others.

Do you remember the story of the lame man in Mark 2? He had some friends that loved him so much that they went to incredible lengths to serve him. Jesus was inside a home and unreachable because of the crowds packing into and around the house. But they were undaunted. They humbled themselves, ignoring the crowd who also wanted to see Jesus; climbed on the roof, dug a hole in the roof and lowered their friend to the feet of Jesus.

And most striking in the text is Jesus' response. *And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."* Isn't it interesting that when He saw the faith of the friends (and we can assume, their faithfulness and love and serving hearts.) He responded by forgiving the paralytic's sins.

What greater need does a man have than being forgiven of his sins? And what better work can you do than to bring your friends to the feet of Jesus Christ? This is what He is calling you to do. Only if you love will you desire to do it. Only if you are willing to roll up your sleeves and consider how to best bring them to Christ, will you even try. Who do you know who needs cleansing from their sins? Would you be willing to spend a little time thinking about how you might best introduce that person to Jesus?

3. It is a call to restore.

If we remember the context for Jesus washing the disciple's feet, we remember that the disciples were already washed and cleansed in their souls. They did however need to keep washing their feet on a

daily basis. Or as we've seen, they needed to daily confess their sins and be washed by Christ.

There is a sense in which we need to remember that we have a responsibility to each other in the family of God. All of us continue to battle against sins. We need the encouragement and help and example – and sometimes the restoring hand of another Christian. Galatians 6:1, 2 says, "*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*

If we truly love one another, we will gently . . . in love . . . and with a motivation to serve . . . and with great humility . . . bring a basin of water, the truth of God's Word, and help restore one who is struggling with sin.

This mission given to us is one that must be carried out both in what we say and in how we say it. That's the power of this passage. If we follow His example we will not only have the right message to speak, but the right package in which we speak it.

IV. An Expectation to Embrace.

We end with verse 20. *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.* If you will love people from your heart, humble yourself to serve their real needs, and take them as best you can to the feet of Jesus, then you will bear fruit for Christ. You can expect that some will receive you. They will be glad for your help. They will listen to your message. And they will be changed. Not because you have changed them, but because when they receive you they are receiving Christ.

And when they receive Christ they are receiving the life of the gospel. What better thing is there for you to do than going into the places God has placed you and offering to wash to feet of those in your life?

What kind of servant have you been? How will you follow the example of Christ?