

Maundy Thursday Sermon March 24, 2016  
John 13:1-17  
Jesus Serves  
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“Truly, Truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” This isn’t exactly the most profound thing Jesus ever said. Of course a servant isn’t greater than his master. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all. Yet, even as he sits at the table pondering how he will return to his Father in heaven in all glory and majesty, Christ gets up, takes off his cloak, gets down on his knees and starts washing his disciples feet. Christ is Lord over all. Yet, he does the task of a slave. Here Jesus teaches his disciples, and us too, who are also disciples of Christ, an important lesson. “If I then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

Now Christ isn’t instituting a Sacrament here. It isn’t part of the liturgy that we take off our shoes and wash each other’s feet. Rather, Jesus is teaching us to humble ourselves and to serve one another. If Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, equal to God the Father in respect to his divinity, the one for whom and through whom and by whom all things were made whether in heaven or on earth, if this Jesus Christ can get on his knees and wash the grime and dirt off the toes of his disciples, what service is beneath us?

Now, it might come as a shock to some people, but none of us is God. None of you is more important than the person sitting next to you. And even if you have a human office that places you above someone else, whether that is a mother to a child, an employer to an employee, a teacher to a student, or a governor to a citizen, your ranking would be insignificant compared to Christ’s. There is no office higher than Christ’s. So if he is willing to serve his disciples, we ought to serve one another. And how should we serve? In whatever way we can. Christ says, “A new command I give to you, that you love one another;

just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

There is no good service that you can do for another person that is beneath you. Rather, wherever there is the opportunity to show God’s love, Christ wants you to do it. Not in a showy way. Not to bring honor to yourself. Rather, do good for the sake of your neighbor. Don’t announce it. Do it in secret if you have to, so that only your Father in heaven knows the good you do. This command of Christ teaches us to be selfless, humble, and eager to help. It destroys an inflated ego, selfishness, and laziness. It makes you look away from yourself and to your neighbor. Do you have a brother or sister in Christ, who needs your assistance? Is there a stranger who needs help? Be watchful, so that you can serve. Christ makes clear that his Christians (and they are *his*) ought to be happy to be slaves to each other.

We ought to serve others, because Christ serves *us*. This is the greater lesson in this text. Yes, you ought to serve as Christ serves you, but that Christ serves you is most important. When Jesus kneels down to clean Peter’s feet, Peter objects. “You shall *never* wash my feet,” he says. But Christ responds, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” If Jesus does not serve you, you have no part in him. Those who reject Christ’s service for them cannot claim Christ as their Teacher or Lord, their friend or brother; they cannot claim Christ as their Savior. Christ saves us by serving us.

We call our worship “The Divine Service.” This is a very appropriate name. God *serves* us in our worship. God condescends to us to forgive our sins, declare his good favor with us, to listen to our prayers, and to feed us the medicine of immortality, Christ’s true body and blood. Yet, this Divine Service stems from the Great Divine Service, which Jesus will accomplish for us just a few short hours after he finishes washing his disciples’ feet. During their meal Judas scurries off to gather a band of soldiers to arrest his teacher. From then on Jesus endures mockery and shame, spitting and beating, until finally he is nailed to a cross and lifted up as a cursed man on a tree. This is Christ’s final service for us before he is

placed in the tomb. And it is *this* Divine Service, which sets the table for every Divine Service we enjoy in Church.

Christ did not come to be served, but to serve. His greatest service was his suffering and death for all sins. And it is by his service on that tree that he washes our feet even today. Christ washes our feet by declaring to us the forgiveness of sins, freely, liberally, to all who repent. Christ washes our feet by feeding us the same body that was nailed to the cross and the same blood that spilled from his pierced side. Christ washes our feet by cleansing our hearts of guilt through the proclamation of the Gospel. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for everyone. Yet, you personally can only receive the service of Christ's death through his Word and Sacraments. It is only through Christ's Word and Sacraments that your feet are washed by your Savior. And it is only by this washing that you have a part with him.

Jesus said, "Not all of you are clean." He said this of Judas Iscariot. Jesus washed Judas's feet. Yet, Christ says that he is not clean. The reason is Judas did not have faith. It is only through *faith* in Christ's service for you that you become clean. Jesus died for the entire world. There is no man or woman whose sins were not entirely erased by Christ's blood on the cross. Yet, without faith in this Divine Service, a person cannot receive the benefits of the removal of sin. When I preach from this pulpit that Jesus died to forgive all people, there is not a soul in these pews for whom that message does not apply. Yet, if one of you refuses to believe it, you hold your sin to yourself and refuse to pass the guilt to Christ. If a hypocrite, who secretly did not believe that the bread and wine are truly Christ's body and blood given and shed for full remission of sins, were to eat the bread and drink the wine in the Lord's Supper, he would still eat and drink Christ's body and blood. He cannot undo Christ's service by his unbelief. Yet, he would not receive the benefits of Christ's Sacrament, rather, he would eat and drink to his own judgment.

Faith is not a work. Faith is the opposite of a work. Faith receives Christ's work. Faith assents to Christ's service. Unbelief refuses to receive Christ's service. It doesn't stop Christ's service. But it removes the benefits of that service. Unbelief is the refusal to let Christ wash your feet. Yet without

Christ's washing, you have no part with Christ, no forgiveness, and no life after death. Yet, when you receive Christ's washing in faith, that is when you hear and believe the proclamation of the Gospel and eat and drink Christ's body and blood, trusting that it is given and shed *for you*, you are joined to Christ forever, you are clean on the inside and out, and you have life that lasts for eternity.

Faith is not a work. But if you have faith, you are busy working. Your Lord and Master has gotten on his knees, removed his royal robe, and washed you clean. Christ Jesus has served you in the humblest way. So serve others. You have been forgiven, so forgive others. You have been helped, so help others. You have been loved, so love others. And may God bless your service.

Amen.