

Now, before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to his Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"

Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand, but afterward you will understand."

Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him. "If I don't wash you, you have no share in me."

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed has no need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.

And you are clean but not every one of you." For he knew who it was who would betray him;

that was why he said, "Not every one of you."

When he had washed their feet and put on his garments and resumed his place, he said to them,

"Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and you are right, for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

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.

If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

John 13:1-17

Lord, Do You Wash My Feet? John 13:1-17

Properties Chair, Carl Mende

Our Call to Worship this morning began with "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." As we have worked our way through the Gospel of John, we have seen time and again situations where Jesus had removed Himself from the people because, John tells us, "it was not His time yet". For instance in John 6, after He had fed the 5000, when the people wanted to take Him by force and make Him their King, it says in verse 15, "...Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

In John 7, when Jesus went up to Jerusalem and began teaching in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, we read about the Jewish leaders, "So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." However, now in our Call to Worship we read, "... Jesus knew that His hour had come ...". What we are going to see is that these words, "His hour had come," will set the stage for everything that is going to happen in the next few chapters of John's gospel.

Jesus' public ministry is over and it is now time for Him to return to the Father. He knew that in just a few short hours, He would be hanging on the cross and His thoughts were still not on Himself, but rather on those that belonged to Him. It says, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." The phrase "to the end" in the Greek really has a better sense of "to the utmost" or "to the fullest extent". The ultimate demonstration of this love would be His sacrificial death on the cross and this emphasis on love sets the tone for the whole Upper Room discourse.

It goes on to say, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper." What this tells us is that Jesus knew exactly who and what He was, He was Emmanuel, God with Us. He knew that He was the Son of God, a member of the Godhead. He was fully aware of His divinity, of His divine origin and His divine destiny.

Knowing all this, what does Jesus do? We read that: "Jesus...rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him." Normally a servant would have been present to perform this act, but since this was a private, even secret, meeting with just Jesus and the disciples there were not any servants present. It is interesting to note that none of the disciples had offered to perform this duty. In fact, in Luke's gospel it tells us that they were arguing with each other about who would "be regarded as the greatest." But Jesus rose from supper and removed his outer garments.

Leon Morris in his commentary says that Greek here for "outer garments" is plural and indicates that Jesus stripped down to His tunic, which would have been the same garment that a slave would wear. The washing of feet was a task given to the lowliest of all of the servants in a home. What we see here is an expression of the humility and love of Jesus, voluntarily taking on the role of a slave. The passage continues with "Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

It is interesting to note that there is no mention of any of the disciples saying something until He comes to Simon Peter. When Jesus comes to Peter, Peter objects strongly to what Jesus is doing. Peter says, *“Lord, do you wash my feet?”* In the Greek, it is a very emphatic statement that stresses the difference between Jesus and Peter. This response does express Peter’s love for Jesus but it was from a worldly perspective, out of pride and not humility. Jesus responded to Peter by saying, *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”* What we see here is that, as with many of Jesus’ teachings, they would not fully understand what was happening until after the cross and the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In the next chapter of John, Jesus will tell His disciples: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”* Unfortunately Peter still views the situation as totally unacceptable, that Jesus should perform the duties of a slave. Peter says to Jesus, *“You shall never wash my feet.”* To which Jesus has to rebuke him and tell him if he does not allow Him to wash his feet, he has no part with Jesus. Peter in his typical all or nothing character responds to Jesus, *“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”*

In other words, *“Give me a bath!”* Which brings us to a powerful statement by Jesus. Speaking to Peter but directed to all of the disciples Jesus says, *“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”* For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, *‘Not all of you are clean.’* The imagery is of a person going to a feast. He will bathe at home, then, when he arrives at the feast, he only needs to wash his feet, which would be dirty from traveling the dusty roads, to be able to sit at the table completely clean.

In the commentaries, there were a number of potential explanations for what this means but the one that made the most sense to me is that, in His words to Peter here, Jesus is distinguishing between two types of spiritual cleansing that all believers experience. First, when a person believes in Jesus as their Savior, God removes or washes away all of the guilt for all of the sins they’ve committed. They are completely clean, like having a total bath. However, even after a person believes, he or she can and will still commit sins and those sins can hurt his or her relationship with God.

So Jesus, when He washed the disciples’ feet, was teaching the importance of continually obtaining cleansing from God for those sins we commit after we give our lives to him. We need to continually go before the throne of grace, confess our sins and ask for that washing. The important thing to never lose sight of is that the foundation of both of these washings is Jesus’ work on the cross. So Jesus finishes washing their feet, puts His garments back on and asks the disciples *“Do you understand what I have done to you?”*

Jesus had given them a lesson in humble service to one another. He says, *“For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”* He is telling them that they should be ready and willing to perform the lowliest of service to one another. As followers of Jesus, we must be willing to perform the same selfless acts of love for each other that Jesus has shown to us. Jesus goes on to say, *“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.”*

The point being that if we are disciples of Jesus, we should never think it beneath us to serve others, since He who is our Lord and Master humbled Himself to serve us, all the way to the cross. Finally, Jesus says, *“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”* Leon Morris says that the phrase *“If you know these things”* carries the implication that in fact they did know these things. The point being that it is one thing to know what to do and another to act on that knowledge. Jesus sets out the principles of what we should be doing in the previous verses but as followers of Christ, we are to act on them.

So where does all of this leave us? First, we have seen that we have been cleansed by Jesus’ work on the cross, washed by His blood and we continue to be washed as we continually submit to Him and to the Father. Secondly, He has taught us by example that we should practice humble service to one another. We often speak of the Gospel message, but the point we need to take home with us is that the Gospel is more than just words. The Gospel is a life to be lived in faith to God and humble service to others and not just an ideal to be thought about.