**Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet**

John 13:1-17
Key Verse John 13:14 – *“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.”*

In last week’s study of John Chapter 12, we witnessed the end of Jesus public ministry. Although Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the light of the world who revealed the love of God to all who would believe in Him, there were far more people who rejected His invitation and chose to remain in spiritual darkness. Even as Jesus performed the very signs of the Messiah and triumphantly entered Jerusalem to the adulation of many, there were those who refused to accept Him as their Humble King. No miracle was great enough to convince them and no teaching was profound enough to persuade them for their pride and desire for worldly praise prevented them from doing so. However, there was one group of people who, despite many spiritual ups & downs, came to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. The disciples had been with Jesus throughout His ministry, giving up everything to follow Jesus. But Jesus knew they still had much to learn. Rather than focus on His own upcoming trials, Jesus used His last days on Earth to teach them about prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, the hope of the kingdom of God and most importantly, the immeasurable depths of His love. Jesus demonstrates His love through washing the disciples’ feet, providing the example for which all of us are to follow. I pray we may come to know the deeper meaning of washing one another’s feet and, in so doing, express the love we have received from Jesus Christ to all who we encounter.

**Part 1: Jesus Loves His Disciples to the End**

Look at verse 1, ***“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.”*** Throughout the Gospel of John, there is an importance on the concept of time. Whether recounting an occurrence of a miracle or poetically describing the spiritual state of the people, the author places a strong emphasis on time. On multiple occasions, Jesus avoided performing a great sign before the masses for, in His words, His time had not yet come. Even as everyone clamoured for a miracle that would fulfill their worldly expectations of Him, Jesus continually reminded the crowds that He worked according to the will and timing of the Father. However, Chapter 13 begins by revealing that the hour had finally come. Jesus knew that by this time tomorrow He would be nailed to the cross by the very souls He came to save, meaning tonight would be one of the last precious moments He would ever spend on Earth. The grim shadow of the cross weighed so heavily on His heart to the point where even He had to cry out to God in fear and anguish. When we go through such experiences in our own lives, it is natural for us to think only of ourselves as we either seek any means to escape our hardship or become overwhelmed by fear and hopelessness. But Jesus had no intentions of throwing Himself a pity-party! Instead, Jesus chose to celebrate this most important of Passovers by becoming the very Lamb who takes away the sins of the whole world (John 1:29). It is with this in mind that Jesus decided to show His disciples the full extent of His love.

May we read verses 3 together, ***“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God…”*** Even as an agent of the devil reclined and ate among them (13:2), Jesus understood this as all being part of God’s sovereign plan. And even though He would later suffer at the hands of evil men, Jesus knew that God had already given Him victory over all of Satan’s schemes. The calmness and courage that Jesus displayed from this point onward was not something born out of false bravado but out of a trusting relationship with God and the knowledge that God has been and will always be in control. Our great worries in life often stem from our fear of not being in control. However, when we genuinely place our faith in God and acknowledge Him as the One who is in control of our lives, we soon come to notice how little in life we have to fear. As the Apostle Paul proclaims “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). And it is this understanding that allows us to act in a way that is in line with this faith.

Now, let us look at verses 4 and 5 together, ***“…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.”*** The word “so” implies that the events that take place are a direct result of what preceded. In other words, Jesus knowing that God was in control allowed Him to do something highly unconventional. Everything from the room to the food was setup for them to celebrate Passover but one thing still remained… they still had to get their feet washed. In Jesus’ time, such a duty was meant for the lowest of servants or slaves and for good reason; imagine the sight and smell of those feet after walking all day in sandals on dusty roads and through occasional farmland! But there was neither servant nor slave in sight. Instead, Jesus took the initiative by removing His outer clothing, wrapped a towel round his waist and began to wash every else’s feet, probably to the dismay of His disciples. Such a thing was completely unheard of and down-right humiliating. No self-respecting Jewish man would ever expose himself in such a way and lower himself to do the work of a slave… much less a rabbi. At the very least, shouldn’t one of the Twelve have volunteered? So why didn’t they?

If we read the parallel account in Luke 22, we sadly see that they were more focused on figuring out who the greatest disciple was than comforting Jesus in His time of need (Luke 22:24). What a sickening picture this is! They were bickering about who was the greatest. And in an argument about who was the greatest, no one was willing to get down to the ground and wash someone’s feet even though Jesus taught them a few days earlier that “"Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matthew 20:26-27). The basin was there, the towel was there, and everything was ready. But no one moved to wash even Jesus’ feet. This is why it is all-the-more remarkable that Jesus did what He did to challenge their pride, ambition and desire for recognition. Only the genuine love and humility of our Servant King Jesus can do such a thing but as we shall later see, the lesson had only begun.

**Part 2: The Meaning behind the Washing**

At some point, Jesus arrives at Peter who is completely perplexed by what Jesus has done. As the #1 Disciple, Peter took it upon himself to talk some sense into Jesus and stop Him from “humiliating” Himself any further. Look at verses 6-8a, ***“He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “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.””*** On the surface, Peter’s response seems quite admirable; this scene should be the other way around. But if we go a little deeper, we see Peter’s sense of pride and reluctance to have Jesus do anything for him. This is not the first time we encounter Peter directly contradicting Jesus’ own words to him (Matthew 16:22-23, Luke 22:33-34). To further emphasize his false modesty, Peter uses the strongest form of negation in the Greek language. Though he may call Jesus “Lord”, Peter often acts as if he himself is “Lord”. The same could be said for each one of us. We live in a society that values the appearance of being fine and self-reliant, where asking for help is seen as a sign of weakness or moral failure. So even when Jesus humbly asks if He can wash our feet as we suffer in silence, we say things like “I’m alright,” “I can manage just fine,” and “I don’t need your charity.” Sounds familiar?

Yet Jesus is unfazed by this; “Jesus answered, ***“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me”*** (13:8b). In denying what Jesus was willing to for him, Peter had rejected His Lord and Saviour as well. So Jesus reminded Peter that for them to have a relationship with one other, Peter had to be willing to let Jesus wash his feet, going against Peter’s notions of duty, honour and His pride. But it goes much further than this. Spiritually speaking, Jesus desired to cleanse Peter of his sins and failures, reaching into the very places only He could but would only do so if Peter accepted Him. This is the same desire that Jesus for each and every one of us. Like feet discoloured and disfigured by all our wearisome travels through life, our souls bear the dirt and stench of sins that we have no power to cleanse for ourselves. But Jesus cleanses our souls of all these and anoints us with the fragrance of His Spirit. All we need to do is to simply accept in the way Peter does in verse 9, ***““Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!””***

Jesus, still speaking of spiritual washing, said, ***"Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean."*** (13:10). There is a difference between a bath and a footwashing. Back then, you would take a bath in the morning to get yourself completely clean. As you went through the day, you had to wash your feet from time to time, because of the dusty roads, but you didn't have to keep taking baths. All you needed was to wash the dirt off your feet when you entered someone's home. In saying this, Jesus provided a new way to view our own salvation: once your inner man has been bathed in redemption, you are clean. From that point on, you do not need a new bath or baptism every time you commit a sin. All God has to do is daily get the dust off your feet. In God’s eyes, you are clean (as Jesus told Peter in verse 10), but on the practical side, you need washing every day, as you walk through the world and get dirty feet. Though we may fall victim to the same sinful ways we struggle with, Jesus already declares us to be clean and acceptable to Him; the only thing we need to do is to receive His grace of forgiveness in every moment we fall short i.e. all the days of our lives.

**Part 3: Wash One Another’s Feet**

Look at verses 13-15, ***“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.”*** In washing His disciple’s feet Jesus taught them the true meaning of Christian service and leadership. By imitating Jesus’ love and humility, we are able to bear with one another despite our many differences and shortcomings. We no longer strive for worldly praise and recognition but seek that which comes from God. We no longer seek what is most beneficial to ourselves but the things that buildup others in our lives. And in so doing, we soon discover how a community that mutually washes one another’s feet is one that truly resembles Christ.

In my case, I was much like Peter in the sense that even though I followed Jesus, I saw myself as the master and refused any help from Him. I was so preoccupied by the appearance of looking fine that I failed to see how my own life was crumbling right before my eyes. However, God revealed His love for me through Romans 5:6-8 to show how He loved me even when I couldn’t love myself to the point of death on the cross, allowing me to share His love. There is also the example of Wah Paw and Jacob who have openly shared the difficulties of practically washing one other’s feet in their marriage life. We were all especially encouraged by Wah Paw’s testimony when she beautifully shared how she was able to truly love Jacob when she started to see him as the person God wants him to be instead of what she wanted him to be. Jacob did likewise as he saw her not as a person who nagged him all the time but a beautiful woman of God who was leading him closer to Christ.

In conclusion, we witness how Jesus revealed the full extent of His love for all mankind and provided a perfect illustration of this through washing His disciples’ feet. I pray we may approach Jesus who is rich in mercy and receive His living water that cleanses us completely from the very depths of our hearts and allows us to wash one another’s feet.