

John 13:1-17; 31b-35

^{13:1}Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” ⁷Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” ⁸Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.” ¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

^{31b}Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Pray: O God of wondrous love, O God of transforming grace, O God who gives so much, let us know your redeeming presence. On this night of remembrance, O God, let the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus fall upon us—to remember, to honor and celebrate, to know the work of your hand in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of our Lord and savior. Amen.

An Example to Follow. On this night of remembrance, we have the passage from John about Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. A nasty job to be sure, one that was delegated to the servants and slaves. And as nasty and smelly as our feet are today, it was much worse back in Jesus' day. Just think—they walked everywhere they went, and they didn't have the best shoes either, just sandals. All the dirt and grime of the dusty roads, the sweat, the crud that gets in between your toes—all of it. And it was customary for the slave of the house to wash the guests' feet before coming in. But on this night, we see that Jesus was the one to take that role, to get down on his knees, to humble himself, to do the lowly task of service toward another

human being, to show his wondrous, amazing love in an act of service. And Jesus uses the event not only to demonstrate the kind of humble servant He is, but also to set us an example for us to follow, that we are to emulate his great love for us, to show love in the same way towards others.

I remember my time in Ames when I was working at the homeless shelter; not only did the Lord open my eyes to some very real problems in our society, but I was also touched by the work of the director there, Vic Moss. You see, I was so moved by his compassion and self-sacrificing willingness to help people, that I recognized the heart of Christ within him. He was an example of faith for me, of the kind of compassion God asks of each of us. In the footsteps of Jesus, he showed me the kind of example that Jesus sets for us to follow.

One of my duties at the shelter was to do the laundry—to wash the sheets and towels the homeless men used. The washer and dryer were open to the residents as well, where they could wash their own clothes. There was also a second bathroom down there. Well, one day, I went down to the basement to do some laundry and I found Vic down there, cleaning up around the toilet. It turned out that someone had stopped up the toilet and left it that way. And forgive me, but this is going to get nasty, for when Vic tried to flush it down, it overflowed and human waste went all over the place. Having children now, I know about cleaning up after messy diapers. Though in years past that task was usually done by the woman of the house, I hope that the men today do their part in the care of their children.

But when I looked to Vic, here I saw this humble man, not saying a word, simply taking the time, diligently cleaning up the mess. Many in society considered the men who stayed at the shelter to be little more than dogs, and many could care less what happened to them. But Vic cared, saw that they were children of God, requiring dignity—he reached out to them, cared for them, fed them and gave them a place to sleep. He even cleaned up after them, doing all the nasty, humiliating jobs that needed to be done.

But that's what you do when you love someone, and at times, let's be honest, that love calls you to do things that you'd rather not be doing, to get down on your knees and serve, even when it's humiliating, even when you think the job might be "beneath you."

An example to follow. Jesus gives us an example to follow.

As Christians, we know that Jesus is always calling to us, asking us to get down on our knees, beckoning us to pick up that cross and follow him. Yet, so often, the cares of this world seem to paralyze us. So often, we are misled by the material consumerism of our culture. So often, we fail to see the world the way God envisions it to be, and we get trapped into looking through our own selfish wants and desires.

Yet, we are all gathered here tonight, because we believe in the one that brings light to the world. We are here because we know that the teaching of our Lord and Savior is foundational to our faith. And it is in those moments, when we see into the heart of Jesus, when we witness his life-changing ability to bring humble love into the depths of despair and hunger, that we most clearly see his capacity as the anointed one, our Messiah.

As we look more closely at this passage from John, we see the example that Jesus sets for us to follow. The occasion is that it is Jesus' last meal with his disciples. And although in the other three Gospels, the Passover feast is highlighted with the Lord's Supper, here the emphasis is on the humble example of service of Jesus Christ. Jesus, got up from the table, fastened a towel around his waste, and got down and washed his disciples' feet.

Now don't you love Peter's response? When Jesus gets to Peter, the faithful disciple throws a fit. "Oh no; you're not washing my feet, Jesus." I mean, this was Peter's Lord; this was the Messiah, God's only Son. How could Peter let him wash his feet? But then Jesus tells him, "look bud, if I don't wash you, you can't have any share of me." And with that, Peter gets the point and completely turns around. He says, "not just my feet, but also my hands and my head."

So Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, and when he is finished, he asks them if they know what he has done. Through this powerful analogy, Jesus says, "Look, if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, shouldn't you go and do likewise?" For Jesus has set an example before them, before all of us, and as followers of the Son of God, we must emulate Jesus Christ's humble service.

And Jesus tells his followers, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus is the example for us to follow, that we should love one another.

At the church in Biddleborn where I last served, there was an elderly couple and the woman had a severe stroke. It was so bad, she was confined to a hospital bed in the fellow's living room for about two years. It was very sad, for the lady couldn't even speak. Yet, there was an awareness in her eyes. She simply hung on to life. Their children said she was hanging on because of her great love for her husband, that she would not die until he had passed.

Now her husband was a character, a farmer by profession, a prankster and certainly just as ornery as Germans can be. Gender roles were firmly established. In their lives, he "brought home the bacon" while she maintained the house: cleaned and cooked and raised the children. And yet, now with the stroke, out of this man's great love for his wife, he took up the role of servant. He bathed her and fed her; he cooked her dinner. He even had to clean up after her and change her. He sat patiently by her side, caring for her needs and remaining steadfast in his love. He suffered *with* her. Why? Because he loved her.

Nothing can compare to the amount of love our Lord has for each of us, that our own God would come down to the world as one of us, not in the role of a stately king or powerful ruler, but in the form and likeness of a slave. Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And yet, my friends, it is exactly in that servant role that Jesus was exalted. Jesus emptied himself, in all humility, in all service. And he was obedient, even to the point of death, death on a cross. A bit later in John, Jesus tells us, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13) Jesus died for all of us, all of us, both the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the healthy and the sick, the saints and the sinners. And this night, we remember the example he set for us to follow, an example of service, an example of love.

Faith is not merely a set of beliefs. It's a way of life. It's a way of listening to the Spirit, being moved by God in the moment, and responding with a penitent heart and a humble soul. And only through acts of service to our brothers and sisters will we ever live out our faith in Jesus Christ.

Tonight, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and we remember when that wondrous meal was instigated, on that night before Jesus gave himself up for us. And when we share in the

communion with our Lord, when we come together as a people of God to remember all that Jesus did for us, we realize that our faith tells us that we are all called to a life of service. Feast on the Bread of Life, my friends, and let it empower you, let it redeem you, let it become a part of you so that we may all share in the Kingdom of our Lord, that we might all live our lives following the example Jesus has set before us. Amen.