

Scripture Reading

John 13:1-17

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.*

² *The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.* ³ *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;* ⁴ *so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.* ⁵ *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.*

⁶ *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

⁷ *Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."*

⁸ *"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."*

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ *"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"*

¹⁰ *Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."* ¹¹ *For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*

¹² *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.* ¹³ *"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.* ¹⁴ *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.* ¹⁵ *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* ¹⁶ *Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.* ¹⁷ *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

Morning Message
Koinonia & Servanthood

Did you hear the news story this past week, about the couple who nearly died in their car; snowed-in on a closed National Park road out west? I believe it was six/seven days existing on bottled water, bread and jam. They ran their car for 15 minutes every 4 hours to generate some heat. Search & rescue teams had been sent out numerous times, but this couple had not been found. But then a man riding a snowmobile came upon them. This man's wife had heard about the lost couple on Facebook, and wondered what she could do. So she sent out her husband!!

This was a wonderful story with a happy ending. But it was also noted in the news that before their rescue, with death in sight, this couple decided to write letters to their families, express their love for them, one final time.

What would you do in such a situation? What would you write or what would you do if you realized death was imminent?

- Would you write a note?
- Would you "live large" until all your money was spent and your time was up?
- Would you create a will, or rewrite a will to reflect different priorities?
- Would you gather those closest to you to say goodbye, or would you use your remaining days getting even with people who had hurt you in life?

If you knew that you were going to die in less than a day, what would you do?

*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.

This is how our morning scripture begins. Jesus knew.... He knew what was about to take place. It was the time of the Passover celebration, when a sacrificial lamb would be killed so that its blood would cleanse and protect all who believed in God's salvation.

Jewish people first did this in Egypt, allowing the angel of death to "Passover" their families who were safe & secure in dwellings marked by the blood of a lamb. But this Passover, Jesus knew that he was to be God's Passover Lamb, whose blood would offer salvation to all the people of the world willing to believe in God's salvation.

>> Jesus knew he was doing to die, and he wanted to love his disciples to the end, so he gathered them in an upper room to celebrate the Passover meal and to offer them his broken body and shed blood. And, as highlighted in John's Gospel, He does one other remarkable thing in the face of death: He teaches them about servanthood. *Facing imminent death Jesus chose to take the time to teach his disciples about the importance of servanthood.*

Just as the last words of a dying person are considered significant and important, this morning we recognize the importance of servanthood to Jesus and to those who want to follow Him.

So today I want to explore servanthood, particularly as it is expressed within *koinonia*, the Holy-Spirit empowered fellowship of the Church, for *Jesus calls us to follow his example and live as servants of one another.* Today we learn a lot about servanthood, "Jesus style". We first learn that....

1. We are to be servants regardless of our position in life.

Jesus knew a lot of things that evening.

- He knew that his time on earth was nearly done.
- He knew what the Heavenly Father had asked of Him; he would be the sacrificial lamb that would take away the sins of the world.
- But Jesus also knew who he was:

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power,
and that he had come from God
and was returning to God*

Though Jesus was viewed by the world as Joseph the carpenter's son, as Mary's firstborn, as a gifted Rabbi and a miracle worker, Jesus fully knew who he was.

- He knew the power he had in his hands that could prove his identity as God incarnate,
- He knew of his past and his future, both defined in heaven.

The Apostle John goes out of his way to let us know that Jesus knew fully who he was, and it is in that knowledge we discover just how remarkable Jesus' actions are going to be.

For despite that awareness of all things, Jesus will choose to be a servant to those beneath Him. To the surprise of his disciples (John highlights that in Peter's reaction), Jesus is going to perform a task normally assigned to the most menial of human beings; foot-washing. And in doing so Jesus set an example for his followers.

From that day on Christians lost the ability to play the “I’m above doing that” card, because their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ the Son of God washed their feet.

And as we know from the Gospel story, Jesus’ humble servanthood would go even farther; he will soon offer up His life for our salvation.

Jesus taught:

John 15:13

*Greater love has no one than this:
to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*

*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.*

Today we also learn that according to Jesus...

2. We are to be servants even to those who fail us.

*As the Apostle John highlights Jesus awareness of who He is,
we are also reminded that Jesus knew who we are.*

Today, most people are “servants” though we normally don’t use that descriptive noun; we usually say “employee”. With employers as “masters”, most employees realize the need to serve those above you. And most people see faithful servanthood to those above them as beneficial, as it brings rewards like praise, promotions and pay-increases.

But as Immanuel / “God with us”; Jesus chose to serve His followers despite knowing things about them that would most certainly give us pause in our servant attitude:

- As he washed Peter’s feet Jesus knew that Peter would soon deny him.
- And washing the other disciples feet, Jesus knew these were men who pledged their devotion would soon scatter in fear.
- And as Jesus washed Judas’ feet, Jesus knew that Judas was about to betray him; to take money in exchange for Jesus’ arrest. Jesus knew that Judas did not serve God, but the Devil; Judas loved money more than God. Jesus knew that:

*the devil had already prompted Judas,
the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus*

As we note Jesus’ actions and hear his directive for those who would follow him, we are not only called to serve those we like; those who can benefit us, but to serve those who cannot help us; even those who have let us down, even those who stand in opposition to us.

When Jesus’ love and servanthood reached its highest level; dying for us on the cross, he did not die because we deserved his sacrifice. He did not die because he owed it to us.

Just the opposite:

Romans 5:9

*God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Jesus knew who He us and He knew us, and yet he washed our feet and died on the cross for us. We are to be servants even to those who have failed us.

Today we also learn that...

3. More than servants, we are to be slaves.

This lesson comes to us as we become better aware of biblical times where there was a difference between servants and slaves. Suffice it to say that in a household that had both servants and slaves, the servants never washed feet; that was the job of a slave. And, according to teachings of other rabbis of Jesus' day, if a person had Jewish slaves and non-Jewish slaves, foot-washing was the job of the non-Jewish slave.

Foot-washing was the task given the lowest of the low.

Jesus was doing slave-work when He washed his disciples' feet. So, more than servants (or should I say "Less than servants...") we too are to be slaves to God? The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans:

Romans 6:17-18

...thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Now as a slave to God, is there anything "too low" for you to do? Again, if **Jesus** washed feet, to what do **you** have the right to say "No"?

Shortly after moving to Chicago to attend seminary, on the weekends I did youth ministry and lived in the Youth House of my home church. While it was mostly a nice clean house, early on an odor in the kitchen drew me to an infestation of maggots under the sink. To this day I can still see them and smell the decay of the dead rodents upon which they were feasting.

While I knew I could have passed the buck to the Properties Chair of the church, I decided to just clean it up. So far, that's the worst "foot-washing" assignment God has thrown my way? I'm really not sure I could do it again!

How about you? What's the worst assignment God has ever given you? Did you do it? Did you pass it on?

Jesus did it. The Son of God made himself a slave to God's righteousness for our sake.

- He humbled himself and became a man.
- He humbled himself in baptism.
- And despite having all power in his hands, he allowed himself to be beaten and crucified on the cross.

Jesus was never a victim. Jesus was always in control, and He freely became a slave to righteousness.

Jesus did it... and he calls us to follow Him.

Are we willing to do whatever it takes to serve others in Jesus' name?

Today we also learn that...

4. As we serve others in Jesus' name, we advance God's Kingdom.

As we set aside our high-positions in life; as we recognize our need to serve all people, even those who have hurt us and failed us; as we open

ourselves to do whatever God asks of us, we soon realize that as we follow Jesus' example of servanthood we too will be advancing God's Kingdom.

And the primary tool used by God to advance His Kingdom is a spirit-led fellowship of Christ-followers where we find ourselves elbow-to-elbow with other servants.

a. For in such a place, rather than a group of people thinking primarily of themselves, the Church builds a *community of people thinking about the needs of others.*

Just as I tell couples approaching marriage, "If you learn to live for the other person, as they live for you, your marriage will survive anything and thrive with God's blessings", so too a community of people living for each other will survive and thrive in this world.

As the early church wrestled with their new freedom in Christ, and the legalisms of eating meat once offered to idols, the Apostle Paul instructed that personal views and actions must take into consideration the views of others, even if it kept them from doing what they preferred to do.

Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 10:24, 31-33

No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

(Which led Paul to offer some practical advice...)

³¹ *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* ³² *Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the*

*church of God—³³ even as I try to please everyone in every way.
For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many,
so that they may be saved.*

Serving others not only draws us closer to one another, but such servanthood will open up doors for God's salvation to touch people. And so the Kingdom of God grows.

b. In that same way, when we serve one another in the Church we experience *healing relationships* within our fellowship.

Just as Jesus knew who we were when He died for us, in any given church parishioners can look across the aisle and see people who have hurt them; intestinally, unintentionally, sporadically, regularly. And when we, like Jesus, go out of our way to serve those very people, God is glorified and His Kingdom advances.

Maybe, at first, your intentions will be misinterpreted and your desire to serve rebuffed. Maybe it will take a number of attempts for someone to accept your actions as sincere, but eventually, through your actions God will mend the brokenness, and His Kingdom will grow when love and forgiveness replace hatred and blame.

c. God's Kingdom will likewise *grow* as that love for one another becomes evident to *people outside the Church*.

For we know *that genuine love attracts*, for God's Spirit is at work in this world, drawing people closer to Him. And when people walk in the doors of a loving church family humbling serving one another, they realize that

they've found something special. They have found a place where they not only will be welcomed and served, but a place where they too can serve.

The primary tool used by God to advance His Kingdom is a spirit-led fellowship of Christ-followers where we find ourselves elbow-to-elbow with other servants.

When we first moved back east to serve Community Covenant I also had opportunity to serve our East Coast Conference of Covenant churches in a number of ways; representing our denomination on the MA Council of Churches, working with a church renewal in NH and participating on the Conference Nominating Committee.

It was in that last setting that I discovered that our Conference had the same problem we have here in Hopkinton; we have more needs than we have volunteers.

Much of our time on the Nominating Committee was spent talking with pastors and getting names of people in their churches with gifts needed for Conference work; people who had wisdom & passion to serve on the Pilgrim Pines Board, or the New England Seafarers' Mission Board. We needed volunteers willing to offer guidance to our Superintendent on the Conference Board.

Any names we got from pastors always came with this caveat; "It's hard to recommend people for Conference work because we need those same people serving here in our church."

All the churches we contacted had the same problem: Too many needs, not enough volunteers.

Today, allow me to challenge all of us with the following observation:

If we are indeed “followers of Jesus Christ”; our Holy God who came to us to serve and to call us to serve one another, then we would never have a volunteer problem.

Indeed, our problem would be just the opposite: We would have more volunteers than needs!!

- more SS teachers than students
- more window washers than dirty windows,
- more caregivers than people needing visits,
- more leaf rakers than rakes,
- more nursery-workers than babies
- more youth workers than teenagers.

Can you imagine such a strange world?

If you can, than you are imagining a church filled with followers of Jesus Christ, who said;

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

.... no servant is greater than his master,

nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

And we are blessed whenever we are willing to follow Jesus and serve one another. AMEN

