



John 13:1-20

TITLE SLIDE

READING VIDEO

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

Do you remember Upstairs Downstairs? There was a newer version of it recently which told of the relationships between the rich and privileged family and their entourage of servants. Everyone knew their place. It was unheard of for the master and his family to do the servants job. The servants knew their place. The scandal came when someone broke that convention – like the master’s son marrying a servant for example. The aristocrats often shunned “new money” - people of humble backgrounds who had made it good. Everyone knew their place and servants could be as strict as their masters in maintaining it.

JESUS WASHES HIS DISCIPLES’ FEET

Jesus was someone who did remarkable things that made his disciples gasp with amazement. Many of these stories are related for us in the Gospels – turning water into wine, healing the sick, calming the storm, feeding the 5000, walking on water. Then there were the amazing teachings. But nothing it seems had prepared them for that evening in the upper room when Jesus broke the social convention and as the master, did a servant’s task.

Each time we take communion, we remember the focal event of that upper room; the way Jesus broke bread and drank wine. He knew what was coming and introduced the disciples to the very simple act which would be a reminder to them always of what He was going to do for them and what He did. Then there is this other incident in the upper room that is as potent an image which is when Jesus washed His disciples’ feet.

John only relates this part of that last evening to us. Perhaps it was because he knew that the breaking of the bread was already well known and we also need to know the rest of the story. Whatever the reason, we have been given this amazing and unexpected incident. Unexpected because it was absolutely unusual for anyone but the lowest servant ever carried out foot-washing. It was the grubbiest and most menial servant task. It’s interesting that up to this point, no-one had offered to do the job. We know from the other gospels that some of the disciples had an inflated opinion of themselves! Merrill C Tenney comments on their unwillingness to take lowly positions by saying *“They were ready to fight for a throne, but not for a towel.”* So what a shock it was when Jesus did the foot washing. Why did He do it? To relate some important things about who He was – just as the bread and the wine were to be I would suggest.

JESUS SERVED HIS DISCIPLES

This was the shock thing. Masters never served their disciples or servants. They should have been in submission to Him, yet He humbles Himself and becomes submissive to them. Why?

VERSE 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.

This verse helps us. Here we see Jesus, someone whom already had authority, showing a symbol of His love for His disciples, but submitting to them. Everything from this point was going to be downhill from here. He was going to be humbled as He was betrayed, arrested, falsely tried, beaten and executed. He had power, but He voluntarily was making Himself subject first to His disciples and then to those who would kill Him.

This act of Jesus reminds me of Philippians 2:6-8 which says “ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!* “ And here we see Jesus in this simple act even as a human being of taking off His Master’s cloak and putting on the uniform of a servant – a towel – ready to

perform the most menial slave job. And in that upper room what was the passover meal, to be instituted as what we know as communion was prefaced by Jesus washing the disciple's feet. The greatest thing that ever happened in the universe – the death of Jesus was prefaced by His humility.

Jesus was not only doing this mindful of what was to come, but also to teach His disciples an important truth: JESUS ENCOURAGED His disciples to serve one another. Jesus never asks His disciples to do anything He wasn't prepared to do Himself. His humility was an example to them:

VERSE 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.

Now I know at this time of the year some churches do symbolic foot-washing to mark the example of Christ, but I don't think that was the intention here. We don't wash people's feet any more – we have shoes that resist the mess and we can take them off. Jesus was prepared to do the most menial task for His disciples even though He had it in His power to do greater – and maybe what might be considered more useful things. Yet He dealt with their most simple needs. And we are called to do the same – to serve one another, particularly when the need perhaps seems trivial, beneath us or not appreciated.

I praise God for those I have come across over the years who have helped me and others in the small things. It's often those small acts of kindness that can make a big difference in people's lives. We are called to wash each others feet goes further than that – to be prepared to help wash off the messes other people get themselves into. Jesus came to deal with people irrespective of who they were and He ministered to the sick, to the outcasts, to the people on the bottom of the pile. If He'd been like religious leaders of His time he would have stuck with the rich, influential and religious, all who wanted to give Him attention too. But He humbled Himself and washed His disciples' feet.

Foot washing was an important part of coming together for a meal in Jesus' time. As people came to eat, the servant would wash off the dust from everyone's feet. It was simple and practical. No-one wanted to make a mess indoors, so their feet were washed. We have come together for communion this morning. It's a meal and this story reminds us that

WE NEED TO COME BEFORE GOD WITH CLEAN FEET

Jesus wanted to wash Simon Peter's feet. Peter refuses. How could he allow Jesus to wash his feet. He knew the social order – the Master should not wash his feet.

Typically Peter, then over-responds when Jesus says he must by saying "in that case, give me a bath". Here's Jesus' reply:

VERSE "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." As His disciples, they were all fit to be in His presence – except Judas of course.

When we came to Jesus and accepted Him as Saviour and Lord we became His disciples. Because of His broken body and shed blood, we have, through faith been made clean; fit to be in the presence of a holy God. But as we come to the table this morning, we come out of our lives before the Lord and around His table, and we've picked up some dirt. We are still fit to be in His presence, but these words of Jesus remind us that we need to allow Him to wash of the mess because it's bad manners to come around the table with dirty feet, just as it's bad manners to go into someone's hose with our shoes covered in mud! In a few moments we are going to do that as we come in confession.

However, there's another aspect to this passage. It's not just about serving one another when Jesus said *14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.* That's the traditional way the Church has looked at these words. But there's much more. Jesus took responsibility for cleaning His disciples' feet. He didn't say "your feet are dirty, here's a bowl, wash yourself". He washed their feet. He made sure that they were fit for their Passover meal. He took responsibility for them.

As we come before God for this meal this morning, and as we come to worship any time, we are people who should wash one another's feet. It's very similar to the message I brought two weeks ago. We're called to be responsible for encouraging one another, warning one another, forgiving one another, loving one another. We have a responsibility to one another as disciples of Jesus Christ. It's the responsibility of all of us all of the time. And sometimes that's necessary. We always offer prayer as part of our morning services. Why? Because often we come to a point in our lives where somehow we can't find the strength to pray ourselves. God has given us one another so we find that strength as others minister to us. Washing one another's feet is very practical – and very simple!

COMMUNION TITLE

So the greatest service we can render another believer is to make sure we have clean feet. To look out for them, to encourage to warn, to remind each other of who God is as we come into His presence. From me right now as the person leading Communion this is that reminder – we all need to come in confession. Let's confess our sins, allow Jesus to clean off the dirt our lives have got us into as we come around His table.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

COMMUNION TITLE

1 CORINTHIANS VERSES

COMMUNION TITLE

*Preached by Mark Reid
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