



3. A Passion to serve one another (John 13:1-20)

"I have spent long hours in the intensive care waiting room....watching with anguished people... listening to urgent questions: Will my husband make it? Will my child walk again? How do you live without your companion of thirty years?"

"The intensive care waiting room is different from any other place in the world. And the people who wait are different. They can't do enough for each other. No one is rude. The distinctions of race and class melt away. A person is a father first, a black man second. The garbage man loves his wife as much as the university professor loves his, and everyone understands this. Each person pulls for everyone else.

"In the intensive care waiting room, the world changes. Vanity and pretence vanish. The universe is focused on the doctor's next report. If only it will show improvement. Everyone knows that loving someone else is what life is all about."

Long before we're in the intensive care waiting room maybe we can learn to live like that.

Wes Seelenger

It's strange how our circumstances can determine our behaviour. When we find some sort of shared misery or shared trial, somehow people pull together – often complete strangers. People who experienced the last war have often told me how people in whole neighbourhoods supported one other during the darkest days of the war – and how it quickly evaporated when it ended!

However these days that spirit simply doesn't seem to exist. An evangelist was on a bus when he felt that the Lord was asking him to speak to the man on the seat in front of him. "Excuse me," he said, "can I share something about Jesus with you?". "No" was the sharp reply. The evangelist thought for a moment then said, "Why won't you speak to me?" "We have not been introduced," said the man. "I never have anything to do with people I don't know." "Oh" said the evangelist, "what would you do if you have a heart attack and collapse right now? Who would you call on to help you? I'll tell you - it would be me!"

You can imagine how surprised people are when they are helped by someone – a neighbour, a friend, a stranger – whether it is the person who visits them in hospital, helps them with gardening or shows an interest when they have problems. These days, an act of kindness is the exception and not the rule. "Look after number one" as the old saying goes.

And we find in Jesus the exception! Jesus smashed all conventions about what life is all about and we see in this story this morning how Jesus overturned what His disciples expected of Him. He did it because He wants us, His disciples to smash those conventions too. Jesus washing the disciples' feet is one example of what all this is about. Everything about this act of foot washing that Jesus did made no sense at all to His disciples because it just wasn't the way that things were done in their world.

Let's get the perspective on this. In those days people walked around in cloaks and tunics so their legs and feet were bare. People wore sandals so not surprisingly their feet and lower legs got very dirty. Foot washing necessary after a day on the hot dusty road. Therefore, the feet were the lowliest part of the body. Callouses, cuts, damaged nails, ingrained dirt. It was the lowliest servant usually a slave which got to do this because it was unpleasant work.

It would be quite normal for Jesus and His disciples, as guests in someone's house, to have their feet washed by the house slave. But on the evening we have related to us in our reading, there wasn't one, possibly as they were together in a room that Jesus had arranged for them. So who gets the job of washing feet?

Jesus was the master, the rabbi, so He wasn't expected to. One would have expected one of His

devoted followers. We know already that the disciples were competing with one another for the highest place of glory. In the first sermon in our series we saw James and John wanting a place of honour at Jesus' side. The others weren't much better. 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."**

What do we read Jesus did? HE washed his disciples' feet – He did the job of the most menial servant – he washed their feet. He even prepared himself properly for it. This was not token thing *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.*

Why do this? The early verses of the chapter are very poignant: *Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.* He was there to wash the dirt from their lives. It's a wonderful symbol of the forthcoming cross. Even more important is 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* He did this in the full knowledge of His power and authority. Jesus deserved *their* obedience and *their* service, yet He serves their most menial desire. And in doing that He shows us that even though as the Eternal Son He did not have to wash the filth of sin He finds so detestable out of our lives, His love for us meant that He was prepared to come to where we were and give His life so He could wash the sin from our lives – that we could find forgiveness and relationship with a holy God. Such humility. Jesus isn't a token Saviour who says He loves us. He got up and did something about it.

You know what's even more amazing – He still does. As we walk through life, we land in all the muck and mess of the world and we are dirtied by it. Yet we have a Saviour who still comes to us and is prepared to wipe the dirt off. John was one of those who had the dirt wiped off his feet and could later write 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Peter didn't think it was right that Jesus as the Rabbi, should wash His disciples' feet. . You can't do this – it's outrageous. And he gets this reply from Jesus *"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!"* NO he was clean already, he only needed his feet washed from the dusty road.

If we have trusted Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, then we are cleansed from our sin. We don't need to come back again for cleansing afresh time after time – but we do need to let Him wash our feet regularly. In fact if Peter had refused then Jesus said *unless I wash you, you have no part with me. What did He mean?* In the spiritual sense Peter was already clean because he was a follower of Jesus -a disciple. Yet to remain in fellowship with Him, he needed to accept what Jesus was doing for him. And that was just feet. We are followers of Jesus and we have been made clean by His sacrifice for us on the cross. But we are dirtied by the road of life. We can't walk in Jesus path with dirty feet! It puts us out of fellowship with Him. It doesn't put us out of His kingdom, but you can't have a day by day walk with Him if you don't let Him deal with the issues in your life.

Far too many Christians try to walk with Jesus with dirty feet. . Maybe you find it difficult to walk as a Christian. Maybe your feet are dirty. As we come around His table this morning – let Him wash you as you come before Him confessing your sin this morning.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

But there is another aspect to this story, which is our theme this morning. It's found in verse 2 *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.*

He washed their feet now they should serve one another. *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.* This has been a persistent theme in my

preaching over the past two and a half years. I didn't engineer it that way – it's the Word of God. We are called as the people of God to love one another and serve one another. And what was service to Jesus. First of all, He gave His life for each of us. John says in His first letter *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* I don't know how many times I've now said that the Christian word for love -agape – is a self sacrificing love. It's a love that puts the life of those God has given us fellowship with above our own – to the point of death. Is there anyone you wouldn't die for here this morning. Mmm. I suspect you would say "I'd die for Jesus!" Maybe you'd say "I'd die for him or her. But HER, but HIM? No

But that's not the challenge of this passage you may be pleased to know. But you know if that's what you've said in your mind then you know that doesn't sit well with the Lord and you are in disobedience to Jesus and you deny His cross by doing so. We have thought of Him as King this morning. But what kind of kingship or lordship does He have in your life if you can't obey a simple instruction?

Actually, the implication of this passage is far worse than that. You see Jesus didn't just love His disciples so much that He died for them. He was prepared to deal with them in the muck and dirt of the road and that symbolises the way He gives cleansing and wholeness if we allow Him to wash our feet. He was even prepared to wash the feet of the one who had betrayed Him!

Now, Jesus says – do the same. Wash one another's feet. We no longer have to wash feet – we have shoes and socks – but Jesus calls us to wash one another's feet. We are a welcoming church. Fine. Great. But Jesus calls us to be more than friendly faces. He calls us to minister to one another – to help clean the dirt off the mess of sin that we acquire as we walk through our lives. The world says don't help. Don't get involved because you have problems of your own. Let's minister to one another and not be like those in the intensive care waiting room where a crisis pulls them together.

When was the last time you greeted your brother or sister in Christ? I hope it was this morning – or at least it will be after the service. But when was the last time you helped a brother or sister who was in difficulty. When was the last time you prayed WITH (not FOR – with) them. When did you help a brother or sister last? I hope you can come before Jesus this morning and give good answers for all those.

On the other hand, when was the last time you failed to greet a brother or sister in Christ, or didn't help them, or didn't even pray for them because you don't like them?

I believe Jesus is challenging some of you about this. You may be saying to Him right now "but this... or but that. He's this ... or she's that. He must apologise first. She must realise she's wronged me."

Yet the Saviour who washed the feet of His faithful disciples also washed the feet of his betrayer.

Now go and wash one another's feet. Ease them through the difficult parts of life. Pray with them as they maybe can't do it for themselves. Be that comforter to the lonely and the sick.

People often say to me - "Why do you keep preaching sermons like this? They just make me feel depressed and inadequate. I'd say two things. Firstly this is the word of God. Secondly, if you find the Word of God difficult, it's because God is challenging you. When He challenges us, it is not to condemn, but gives us an opportunity to repent and follow Him, because by His Spirit He gives us the strength and ability to be the people that by human nature we're not.

As I said last week, we are people who by nature are built to serve and Jesus says to all those of us who know Him this morning: serve one another! Maybe you've never accepted Jesus into your life this morning. He wants to be part of it this morning and He died in the world's greatest act of service in order that you might be able to know Him and see His transforming power in your life.

Hymn: Amazing Grace

As we come around the communion table this morning, let's take the opportunity to repent afresh for going through life not allowing Jesus to wash our feet and are now missing something because we've fallen out of fellowship with Him. Let's come before Him and repent this morning.

As we have reflected upon our relationships this morning and we realized that we haven't loved and

served others as we should have. Let' s come before Him and repent this morning.

For those people we feel that we just can' t love then let' s ask Jesus to love them as He loved His betrayer.

In all, as we come into His presence, let' s ask Him to transform our lives.

*Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against You and against our fellow men,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded Your love,
and marred Your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed,
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light. Amen.*



Swaffham Baptist Church
13th March 2005
Scripture Quotes from NIV