

Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

John 13:1-5, 12-17 Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved those who were his own in the world, he loved them to the end.² By the time the supper took place, the Devil had already put the idea into the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.³ Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God.⁴ He got up from the supper and laid aside his outer garment. He took a towel and tied it around his waist.⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

¹² After Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer garment, he reclined at the table again. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.¹³ "You call me Teacher and Lord. You are right, because I am."¹⁴ Now if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ Yes, I have given you an example so that you also would do just as I have done for you.¹⁶ Amen, Amen, I tell you: A servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

In the name of the humble servant of God, Jesus our Savior, dear fellow believers!

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, lived a family with eighteen children. Eighteen! In order merely to keep food on the table for this mob, the father and head of the household, a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day at his trade and any other paying chore he could find in the neighborhood.

Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of the elder children, Albrecht and Albert, had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the Academy.

After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a pact. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his earnings, support his brother while he attended the academy. Then, when that brother who won the toss completed his studies, in four years, he would support the other brother at the academy, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by laboring in the mines.

They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church. Albrecht Durer won the toss and went off to Nuremberg.

Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works.

When the young artist returned to his village, the Durer family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter,

Albrecht rose from his honored position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled Albrecht to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you."

All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No... no... no... no."

Finally, Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved, and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look... Look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bones in every finger have been smashed at least once, and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother... for me it is too late."

One day, to pay homage to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Durer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands," but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love "The Praying Hands." The next time you see a copy of that touching creation, take a second look. Let it be your reminder, that no one - no one - ever makes it alone!

God created people to depend on each other and their acts of service. Many of us have an expertise in one field or another, but the time will come when we need someone else's expertise to help us through life: taxes, health care, home or car repair, etc. The world doesn't work without people serving one another. Serving one another is so crucial to our existence, and good service is so rare that we're often willing to honor those who do their jobs especially well with handsome tips and enthusiastic referrals.

If that's the case, then you will certainly be ready to refer your friends and relatives to Jesus (and maybe your enemies too) when you learn about the kind of service God provides. In tonight's lesson, Jesus not only provides incomparable service to his disciples, but he does it *for free*. With no demands of payment, without pulling rank, without excuse making, or being condescending or patronizing, Jesus serves his disciples with his . . .

Hands of Humility

Jesus had a lot on his mind that night. John repeatedly records the interplay between Jesus' divine and human nature, especially how Jesus knew ahead of time what was about to happen. "**Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father**" (v. 1). He knew! He knew ahead of time that within 24 hours he would lay down his life for the sins of the world. He knew ahead of time that Satan had baited Judas to betray him (v. 2). He knew that the Father had laid all things at his feet (v. 3), and he entered the evening with complete omnipotence and omniscience. Yet rather than leveraging his full authority in some dazzling display of the divine, Jesus exercised abject humility.

While Jesus' mind raced with anticipation of the pain of sin and suffering of hell, while he foresaw the cross he would endure, lovingly conscious of the souls he would redeem, his disciples weren't ready to serve one another. Usually the feet were washed as individuals entered a dwelling. This job usually fell to the lowliest servant. But it hadn't been done even after the meal had started. Not one of the disciples was willing to lower himself to such a disgusting task.

Jesus once fed 5,000 people, but most of them never truly believed. The political elite in Jerusalem were busy plotting his death. And now his own disciples were arrogantly arguing over who is greatest on the

night before his death! Who would blame Jesus if his frustration boiled over and he walked away? “Forget it. These people don’t deserve me. I’ve done enough for these boys already; it’s time for me to think about myself!” Even more maddening, Jesus had settled this argument before. When James and John sent their mother to advocate for them to sit and Jesus’ right and left in heaven, Jesus taught his disciples how to be great. **“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave”** (Mt 20:26,27).

On this Thursday evening, Jesus didn’t opt for another lecture but chose instead to model for them what humble service looks like. **“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”** (Jn 13:4,5). If Jesus would have blown a gasket, we would have understood. But Christ’s love never wavered. Without even a hint of frustration or exasperation, Jesus handled their pride with perfect patience. He overcame their arrogance with humble service. The King of creation, the One who has all authority in heaven and earth, bent the knee to serve his disciples with a task so menial that servants jockey to avoid it. Christ came from heaven on a mission from his Father to redeem the world, and he wasn’t about to quit in the 11th hour. **“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end”** (v. 2).

Much of our Christian service falls short because we base it on the behavior of our neighbor. We shun people who don’t agree with us. Our humble service to others is so often adjusted by how they have treated us.

If Jesus based his service on the disciples’ behavior, no one would have had their feet washed. No one would have had their sins forgiven because Jesus would have never made it to the cross! Jesus’ humility shines brighter and greater than ours because it’s not based on human behavior. Jesus’ humility flows out of God’s love and grace. He serves us because he loves us. His love is unconditional. His love is perfect. Not our behavior, but God’s love moved him to wrap the towel around his waist and wash their feet—and he even washed Judas’ feet too.

You don’t get the idea that Jesus would ever walk out of a restaurant upset over poor service. He didn’t walk out on his disciples, and he didn’t walk out on you either. He came to serve you. **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Mt 20:28). Christ’s obedient death served you well; it paid the ransom price for our pride and entitled attitude, for our obnoxious rank pulling, for making people feel smaller and lesser, and for every other shallow and insecure excuse we’ve ever offered God for failure to serve. **“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin”** (1 Jn 1:7).

The disciples had a history of missing the point. After Jesus washed their feet, it would be very natural for them to feel ashamed. Their disgraceful bickering and position-grabbing attitude had been laid low by Jesus’ humble hands. Jesus, though, wanted to do much more than shame their pride; he wanted to rewire their attitudes and invite them to use their hands of humility. **“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”** (Jn 13:14,15).

Jesus was their Lord and Teacher, and by virtue of his office he was their superior. But he didn’t wave his title in their faces. He didn’t shove his superiority down their throats or use it to avoid humble service to anyone. “Washing one another’s feet” means to show Jesus’ love toward our fellow man. That’s a kind of love that forgets to feel superior, a love that stoops to the lowliest of service and is blind to what it is doing or who it is serving; it’s a love that serves so freely it pays no attention to what it costs, and a love that is so humble it voluntarily serves, regardless of human behavior; a love so pure it seeks not the recognition of man but only the approval of God.

This evening we are gathered especially to celebrate the Lord's Supper as we remember that evening when Jesus instituted this sin-forgiving, promise-filled meal. With those humble, servant hands Jesus broke the bread and offered it and the cup of wine to disciples. Tonight and every time that you come to the Lord's altar for this gracious meal, don't see the hands of those who are distributing the elements. Instead see those nail pierced hands of humility of your Savior. He offers you this bread and cup and assures you that in with and under those elements are the very body and blood which he used to redeem you.

Jesus came to serve, and the service he provides is incomparable, and it's free. Jesus' humble death purifies us of our poor service, and Jesus' perfect humble, hands satisfy God's holiness and provide us the motive to serve our neighbor. Then listen to Christ's call and wash each other's feet. Love and serve your neighbor like Jesus did, with humility. Humility permeated Jesus' life and teaching; it colored his servant attitude. Let Jesus' humility and servant attitude rework your attitude, too. Ask "How can I serve?" and "Who I can serve?" **"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them"** (v. 17). Amen.

Pastor Joel W. Jaeger