

Text: John 13:1-20 (and Philippians 2:5-11)  
 Title: Jesus: Humble and Memorable  
 Date: April 2, 2010 – Good Friday  
 Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Philippians 2:<sup>5</sup> **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>1</sup>**

It was the evening, the evening before the day of days for Jesus. John tells us that...

**“It was just before the Passover Feast. 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. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.” John 13:1-2**

A church was presenting the story of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven as a play. They were being very dramatic and had some wonderful special effects. The most stunning effect was designed to depict Jesus' ascension into heaven, the climactic scene of the whole play. With stage hands off stage pulling on ropes, Jesus would ascend up through a hole in the ceiling and out of sight!

Everything went well. Jesus uttered his Great Commission just before the stage hands began hoisting him through the ceiling. But midway through the flight, the guys backstage lost their grip on the ropes and the Ascension began looking like the Second Coming!

The actor playing Jesus dropped back down and nearly hit the stage, but with incredible poise, he looked at the horrified disciples and said, “Oh, and one more thing. Love one another.” Then the stagehands got their grip and hoisted him through the ceiling.

Were Christ to make an unscheduled stop like that today, he might very well say, “Remember, love one another!”

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<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Php 2:5-11.

The word “love” appears just 12 times in John chapter 1 through 12. But beginning in chapter 13 and heading on through chapter 21, it appears 46 times!

What has changed? You find it in verse 1: **“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time [literally, “the hour”] had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.” (John 13:1)** The “hour” had arrived!

John sets the scene for this story with some wonderful background information in the first three verses of John 13.

**Jesus knew His hour** – the time had come for him to “leave this world and go to the Father.”

But love determined his attitude to this challenge. The pressure of knowing that the hour of death was upon him could have turned him to focus on his own stress & pain – but it didn’t. He turned to address the needs of his disciples.

When we read the account in John 2 of Jesus’ first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, we hear Jesus telling his mother, Mary, **“my hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4)** Jesus was aware that he had an appointment to keep – an “hour” with a cross. In John 12:23-24 Jesus declared that that appointment was now come: **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:23-24)**

Jesus knew that the cross was only hours away. He knew that he would lay down His life for us. He knew that he would take up his life again in resurrection. And he knew that he would ascend to be with the Father.

**Jesus knew His enemy** -- the devil had put it into Judas Iscariot’s heart and mind to betray him.

But love determined his response to his enemy. Don’t think Judas betrayal didn’t hurt Jesus! Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9 to describe the betrayal: **“He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.” (John 13:18)**

The full quotation is this: **“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”**

During the US invasion of Iraq I remember watching some CNN footage of one Iraqi man, attempting to show his support for the Americans and his opposition to Saddam Hussein. He had taken his shoe and was hitting it, heel first, against the face of a wall-sized portrait of Saddam Hussein. He was “lifting up his heel” against Saddam! In the East, to show another person the sole of your foot is considered a severe insult!

The disappointment of knowing that Judas, under Satan's prompting, was about to betray him could have so torn him that he could have collapsed inward in self-pity – but he didn't. He turned to love him even knowing he would betray him.

**Jesus knew His authority.** John tells us...

**“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power...” John 13:3**

But love determined his use of his authority. Literally, the text says that the Father had put all things “into his hands.” Jesus knew that he was sovereign over all. He had all the power, yet he took up a towel, not a scepter!

**Jesus knew His identity.** John tells us...

**“...and that he had come from God and was returning to God” John 13:3**

But love shaped his use of this knowledge. He was leaving this old world behind – but his love and concern was directed to those he would leave in this world. His Father had sent him into the world because of his love for the world. And now the Son was about to love the world by giving His life.

Knowing all He knew, he turned in love towards his disciples to love them even more! John tells us...

**“...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.” John 13:4-5**

He took up **a towel and a basin** to wash their dirty feet with love.

I've always been puzzled by this story of the foot-washing of his disciples by Jesus. And it's been verse 1 that has puzzled me.

I've always thought that the greatest demonstration of the love of God was seen in the cross of Christ. That's what Paul tells us in Romans 5:8: **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

But here, John tells us that Jesus was about to demonstrate “the full extent of his love” by washing the feet of the disciples. ***But how can we relate washing feet to dying on a cross as a profound demonstration of love?***

Well, let me suggest that on one hand, there is something here that Jesus asks us to **let him do for us – something we can't do for ourselves**. He wants us first to **receive His love**.

And then on the other hand, He asks us to do for others **something they can do for themselves**. He wants us second to **share His love** with others.

Both are important and both have to go together. You really can't have one without the other. And they have to come in the order that Jesus gives us here in this story.

### **First, let's think together about Jesus' unique love for us**

#### **Jesus asks us to let Him do something for us that we can't do for ourselves**

John Stott sees this act of foot washing as a drama that pictures the five stages of Jesus' life and ministry that Paul also describes in Philippians 2 – the passage we read earlier. Stott wrote:

**“[Jesus] `got up from the meal' (v.4a), as he had risen from his throne. He `took off his outer clothing' (v.4b), as he had laid aside his glory. He `wrapped a towel around his waist' (v.4c), as he had taken the nature of a servant. He `poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet' (v.5), as he had humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross. Then, `when he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place' (v.12), as he was about to return to the Father.”**

This washing of feet wasn't an exercise in hygiene or social grace; nor was it only a lesson in servant hood, although it does model servant hood for us! Jesus was picturing for his disciples and for us the very reason for his coming – to bring a washing that would cleanse us inside and out!

You get the sense that there's something momentous behind this act as you follow the dialogue between Peter and Jesus.

As Jesus makes his way around the supper table, he washes the disciples' feet without objection. They are silent; perhaps not knowing what to say, they say nothing. But when Jesus comes to wash Peter's feet, big-hearted Peter finds something to say...

**<sup>6</sup> “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” <sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” <sup>8</sup> “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” <sup>9</sup> “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” John 13:6-9**

One scholar translates the strength of Peter's objection this way: **"You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never!"**

"You're my Teacher, my Lord, my God! I won't allow you to stoop so low as to wash my feet!" Peter had a grasp of who Jesus was and because of that, he was overwhelmed by the offer Jesus was making to him.

In that culture, the washing of feet was done because the roads were dusty and the footwear was open sandals – but either the guests washed their own feet or a slave would wash their feet. A host of repute would never stoop to such menial labour, and here Jesus, Peter's teacher and Lord was offering to wash his feet! It went against everything that Peter understood about authority and leadership.

But Jesus responds to Peter's objection by saying, "Unless you allow me to serve you, Peter, you can't be one of mine!"

When Peter realizes that to refuse this demonstration of Jesus' love is to cut himself off from Jesus, he jumps tracks – "Then wash me top to bottom, Jesus!"

God bless, Peter! I'm so glad this impetuous man is included in God's Word! We so often want to serve others in Jesus' name that we refuse to allow Jesus to serve us! We're so ready to be dispensers of grace to others, that we sometimes forget our need to receive it as well!

Before we can give we must receive. As Warren Wiersbe wrote, "it takes humility and grace to serve others, but it also takes humility and grace to allow others to serve you." Sometimes the measure of our humility isn't found in our willingness to serve others, but in our willingness to allow others to serve us.

Jesus then moves the discussion beyond Peter ... suddenly we're aware of a broader audience and a deeper meaning. Jesus said to Peter...

**"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. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean." John 13:10-11**

Jesus used two words for cleansing. One referred to a cleansing of the whole person, a bath, and the other to the cleansing of the feet, hands or head, a washing.

First, Jesus speaks about **"a bath"** that cleans the whole person and doesn't need to be repeated.

When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that we are made clean in God's sight by the washing of the blood of Christ. Paul wrote: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? ,,, And that is what some of you were. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**" (1 Cor 6:9, 11) It's a once for all washing that frees us from sin's penalty. (cf. Rev. 1:5)

Second, Jesus speaks about the need for "**many washings**" our feet.

As we travel through life, we pick up spiritual "road dust" – sin and failure that hurts our fellowship with Jesus. We don't need a bath, just a wash! John tells us in his first letter: "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" **1 John 1:9**

We can't "bath" ourselves spiritually – we can't "wash" ourselves spiritually – only Jesus can!

My nephew was a rather precocious two year old, but he came by his smarts honestly – both of his parents are doctors. His dad is a GP and his mother is a dermatologist. One day, he and his mother were out shopping. The young woman who served them in the store had a large mole on her face that caught my nephew's attention. Being proud of his mother's profession and also wanting to be somewhat helpful, he said to the young woman, 'You know, my mother is a doctor and she can help you with that!'

Jesus looks at our dirty feet and hands and says to you and me, "You know, I can help you with that! In fact, I really need to help you with that! Won't you let me?"

Sometimes we recoil from Jesus' offer to take away our sin & shame as I'm sure that clerk in the store did to my nephew's offer of assistance. Sometimes we respond: "No thanks, I'll handle it myself." Sometimes we respond: "No thanks, I don't want to bother you with it." Sometimes we respond: "No thanks, it's mine and I'm proud of it!" Sometimes we respond: "What are you talking about – I don't see any dirt!"

Jesus waits. Towel in hand. Offer still open. He waits.

There's an old hymn that we're going to sing later that asks the crucial question:

**"Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?  
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"**

Have you been bathed clean of the penalty of sin?  
Do you need to accept Jesus as your Saviour from the penalty of sin?

The hymn also asks another crucial question:

**“Are you walking daily by the Saviour’s side? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?  
Do you rest each moment in the Crucified? And be washed in the blood of the Lamb?”**

Have you been washed of the “road dust” of sin? Are there things you need to confess to Jesus and receive his cleansing so that your relationship with Him can be renewed?

First of all, Jesus asks us to allow him to do something for us that we can’t do for ourselves. We can’t cleanse ourselves of sin; only he can.

But then, as an expression of our gratitude for what he has done for us, Jesus asks us to **do something for others that they can do for themselves.**

**Second, Jesus’ asks us to reflect his love to others.**

Jesus said to his disciples...

**“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. John 13:12**

Some people take Jesus example here in a direct manner. Many Mennonite groups and even some Baptists regularly have foot washing services as part of their Easter events or their communion services. Other churches do the same at various times. Personally, I don’t understand Jesus to be mandating foot washing as he does the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. But if foot washing helps us to remember his main point, then I’m willing to do it ... as I will be doing in a few minutes.

What was Jesus’ main point? Do we understand what Jesus did for his disciples? Jesus was teaching an attitude and he wanted his lesson to be **remembered!**

Jesus said to his disciples...

**“You call me `Teacher’ and `Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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.” John 13:13-15**

In other words, if I'm your example and authority, and if I humble myself to serve you in the most lowly way, then you, too, should humble yourselves and serve each other.

In Jesus' day, the teachers of the Law, the religious leaders that the disciples would have known, loved to reinforce their social prominence by making sure they got the seats of honour at banquets.

Jesus warned his disciples about their example: **"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets."** (Mark 12:38-39)

They would never have thought about washing feet! They were too important! Jesus was warning us not to develop a false view of our own importance. He wants us to develop servant hearts.

Lyle Waggoner is an actor, famous for his roles on the old Carol Burnett Show and the Wonder Woman TV series. Several years ago he dropped out of acting to start his own business. He now owns a trailer company in Hollywood that provides luxury trailers for TV and movie stars while they are shooting on location. Each trailer is identical and there's a reason for that.

"This is an ego-based business," Waggoner said. "This way, none of the actors can feel less important than anyone else. We learned that lesson early on. We once sent out what we thought were equal motorhomes for two lead actors and there was a complaint – one had hubcaps and one had painted wheels. The actress said she wanted hubcaps like her co-star or she wouldn't work. So we had to provide hubcaps."

Jesus warns against "ego-based" living with this beautiful example.

Years ago, Ruth and I were considering becoming missionaries with Africa Evangelical Fellowship, a mission that recently merged with SIM. Our goal was to teach overseas in a mission Bible school and so one day the Canadian candidate secretary, John Pomeroy, came to our home to have supper and talk about ministry.

I really don't remember what we talked about. But what I do remember is this. We had eaten. We had talked. And as soon as our meal was over, John said, "Let's do the dishes." He got up and headed straight for the kitchen without listening to our objections that he let us do them. He washed our dishes!

It wasn't our feet – but it was what needed to be done. It wasn't something we couldn't have done ourselves – but it was wonderful to

have someone do it for us!  
 It wasn't what a "Fortune 500" executive might do – but it was what a servant of  
 Christ would do.

### **And it was remembered!**

Whether it's  
     doing someone's dishes,  
         cutting someone's grass,  
             shoveling someone's snow,  
                 doing someone's shopping,  
                     bringing someone to church,  
 driving someone to the doctor,  
     writing someone's Christmas cards,  
         making someone's supper,  
             taking someone for coffee,  
                 doing someone's taxes,  
                     washing someone's laundry  
 It's all "washing one another's feet."

And Jesus says to us...

**"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." John 13:14-15**

### **Foot washing of the Deacons**